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# **AIR FORCE PATAKA.**

FIFTY YEARS OF THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND  
AIR FORCE IN HAMILTON.

*A History of the Te Rapa Air Force Base.  
1942-1992.*

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Defence and Strategic Studies.

**LINDSAY AMNER.**

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO  
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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

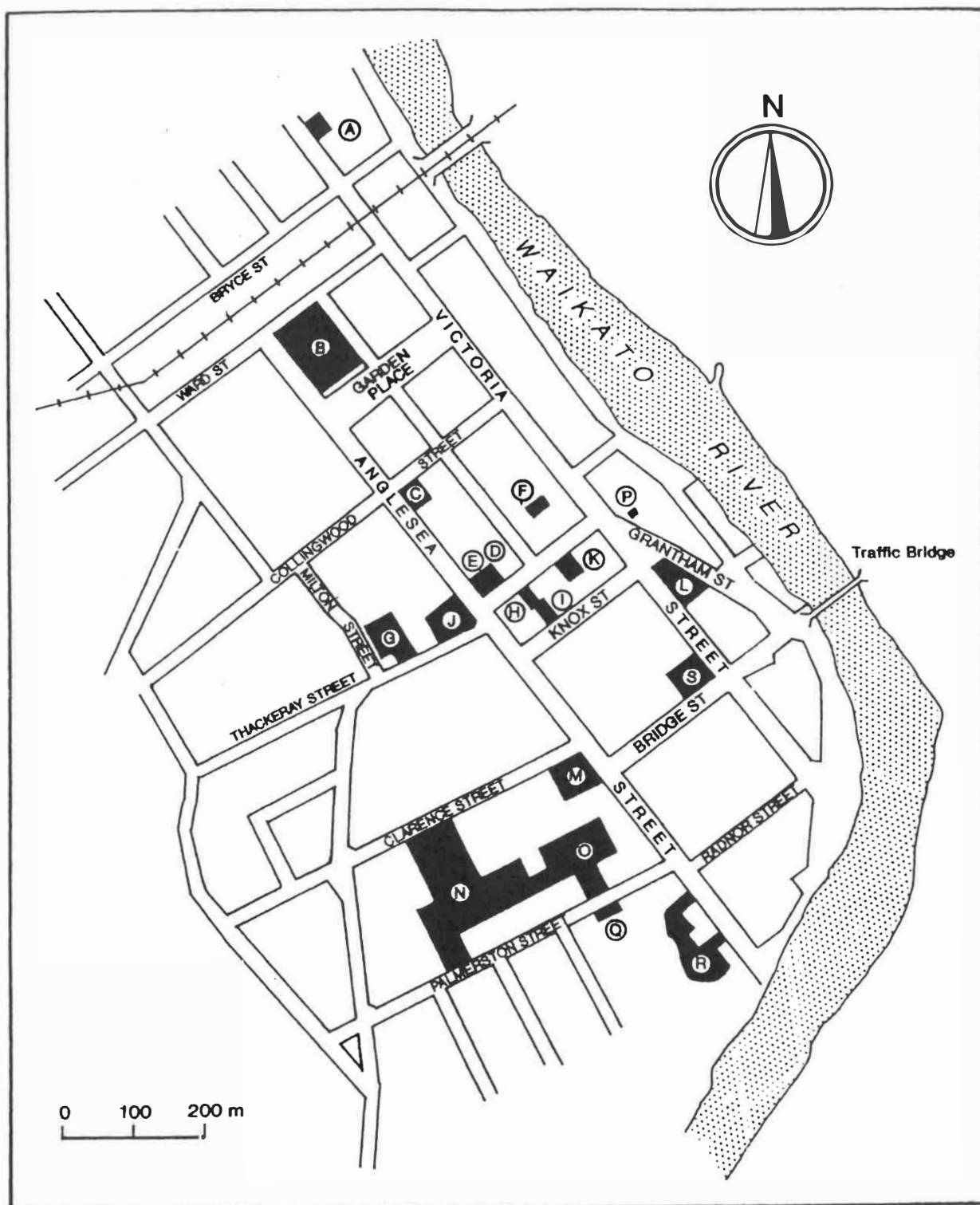
During the course of the research for this history, I have been privileged to meet and interview a number of people who at some time had worked on, or been otherwise involved with the Te Rapa Base. These people all proved of inestimable value in providing their personal memories of their time associated with Te Rapa. Some of their testimony is used and acknowledged in the following pages, but most of what I heard served to give me a background knowledge of Te Rapa, without which I could not have written this history.

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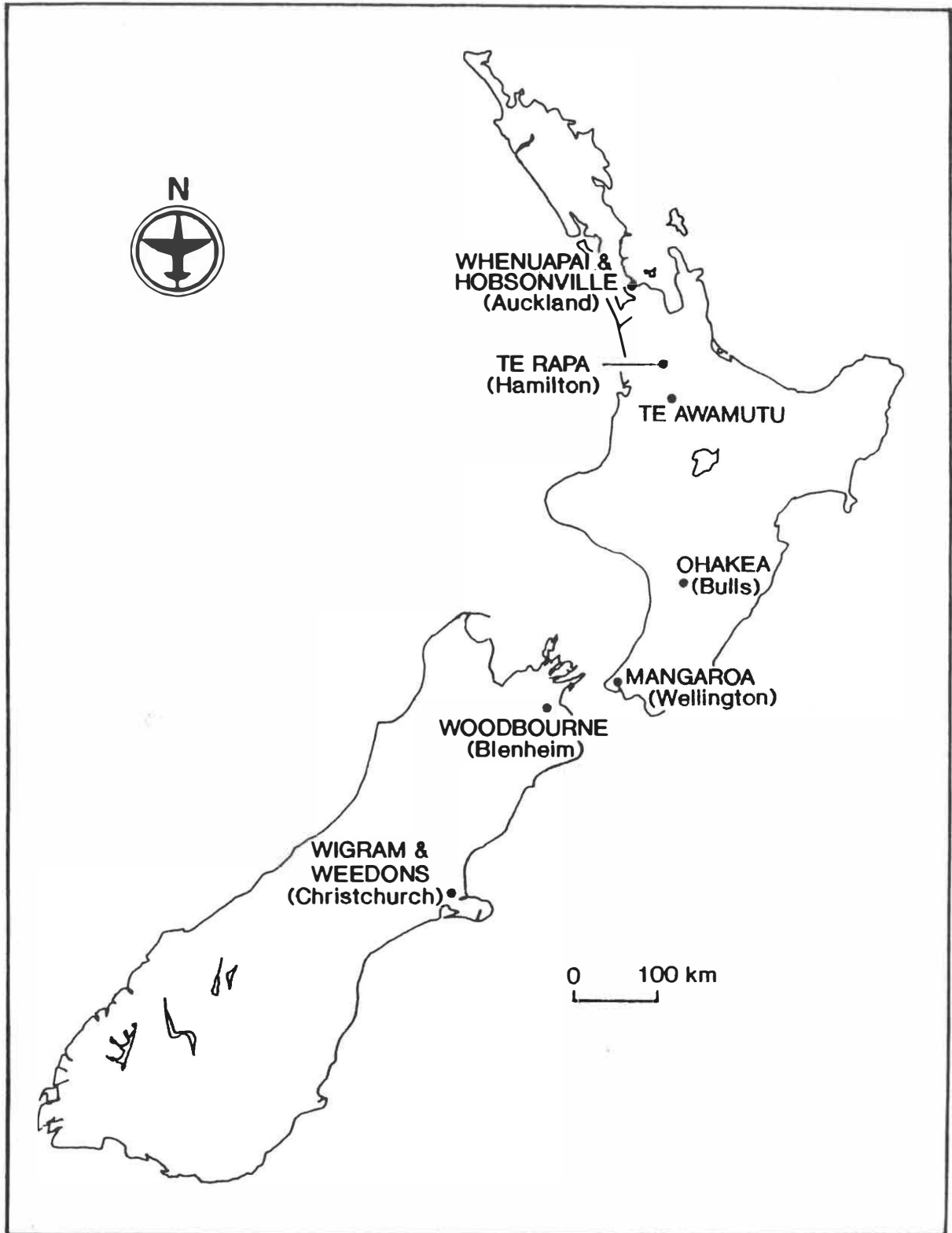
W. O. Hutchinson of the Central Photographic Establishment at Ohakea was very helpful in providing photographs of Te Rapa, and I am grateful for his assistance.

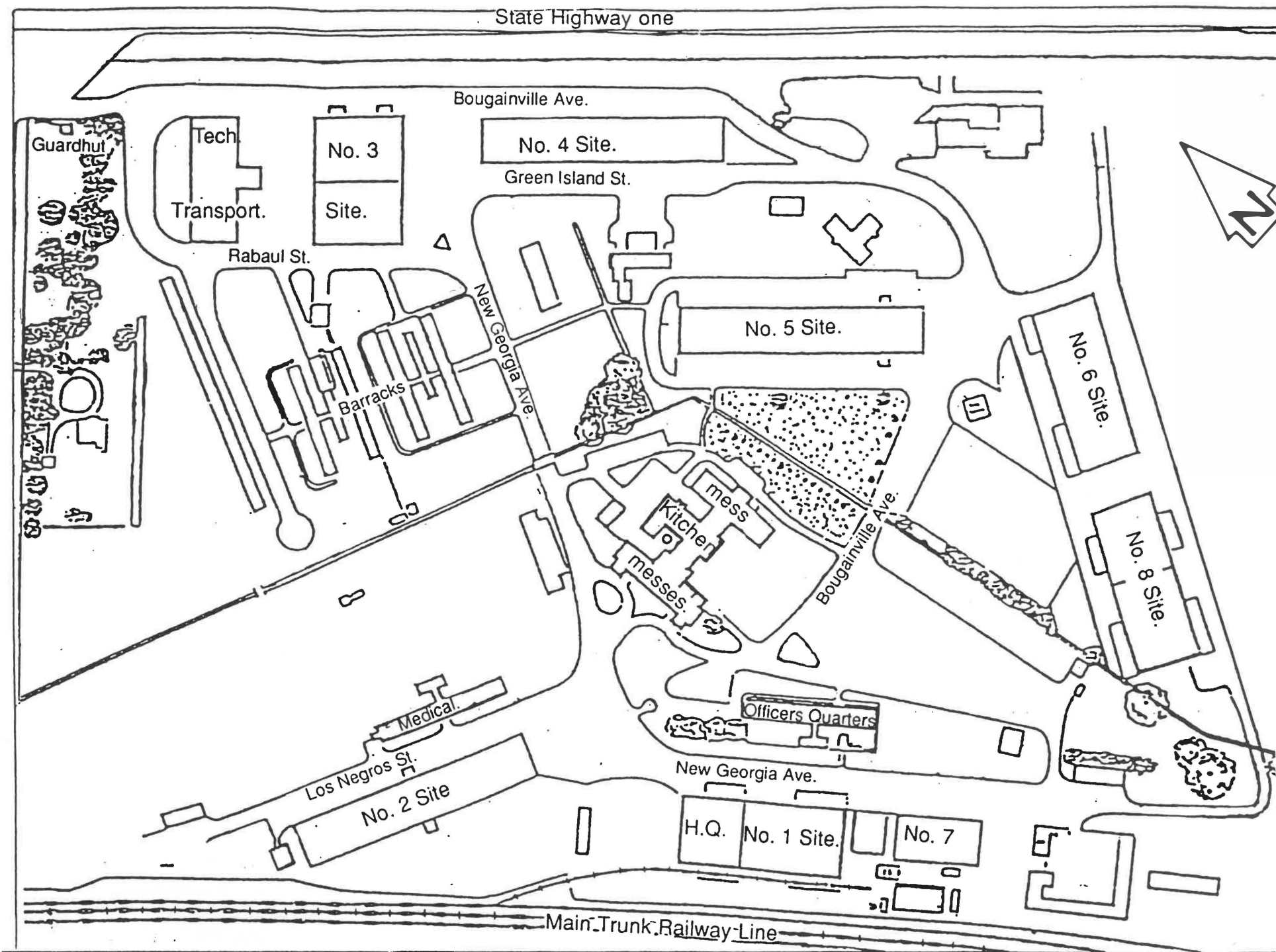
I am also extremely grateful to Sqn/Ldr J. Barry MBE, and the RNZAF Museum, Wigram, Christchurch, for the RNZAF Museum Study Grant, which was vital to the completion of the project.

I acknowledge too, the help I have received from my supervisors, Associate Professor Laurie Barber and Dr. Doug Simes, and from the History Department of the University of Waikato, in the preparation of this Thesis.

**Map 1.****RNZAF LOCATIONS IN HAMILTON, 1942.**

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| A - Station H.Q. Cadman's Building                  | K - WAAF Hostel, Grand Central Hotel |
| B - No. 1 Repair Depot. Winter Show Buildings       | L - WAAF Hostel, River View Hotel    |
| C - Instrument Repair Section. Armstrong Motors     | M - Hospital and Dental Section      |
| D - General Engineering Section. Ebbetts Motors     | N - Central Camp                     |
| E - Instrument Repair School, Ebbett's Showroom.    | O - 45 Small Stores                  |
| F - Instrument Repair School. Howden's Sample Rooms | P - Recruiting Depot                 |
| G - Transport Section. Ebbetts Garage               | Q - WAAF Camp                        |
| H - Signals Repair Section. Foreman Motors          | R - 500 Man Camp                     |
| I - Signals Repair Section                          | S - Equipment Store, Dominion Motors |
| J - WAAF Hostel Midland Hotel                       |                                      |

**Map 2.****RNZAF LOCATIONS IN NEW ZEALAND.**

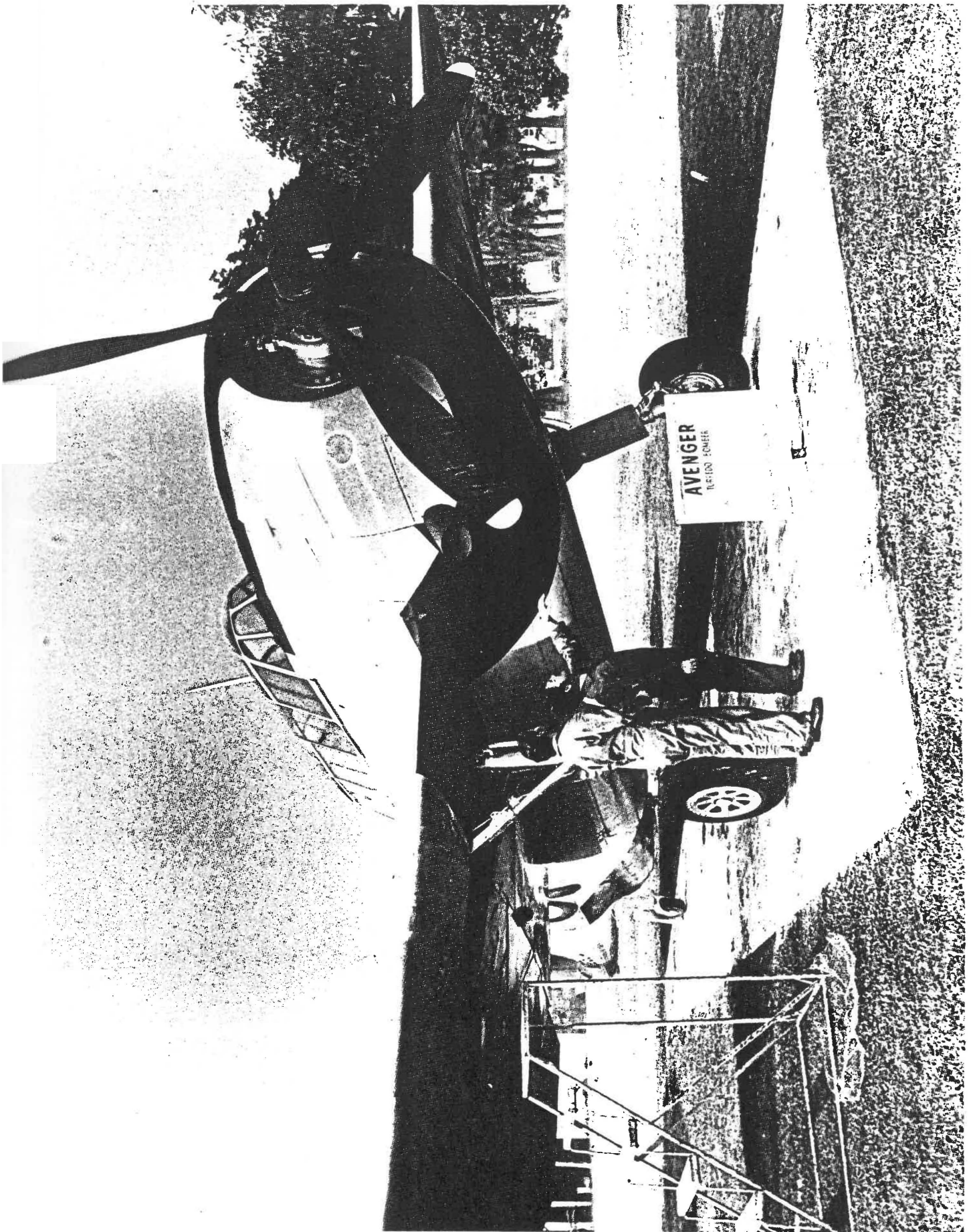


**RNZAF TE RAPA IN 1990**

**Map 3**

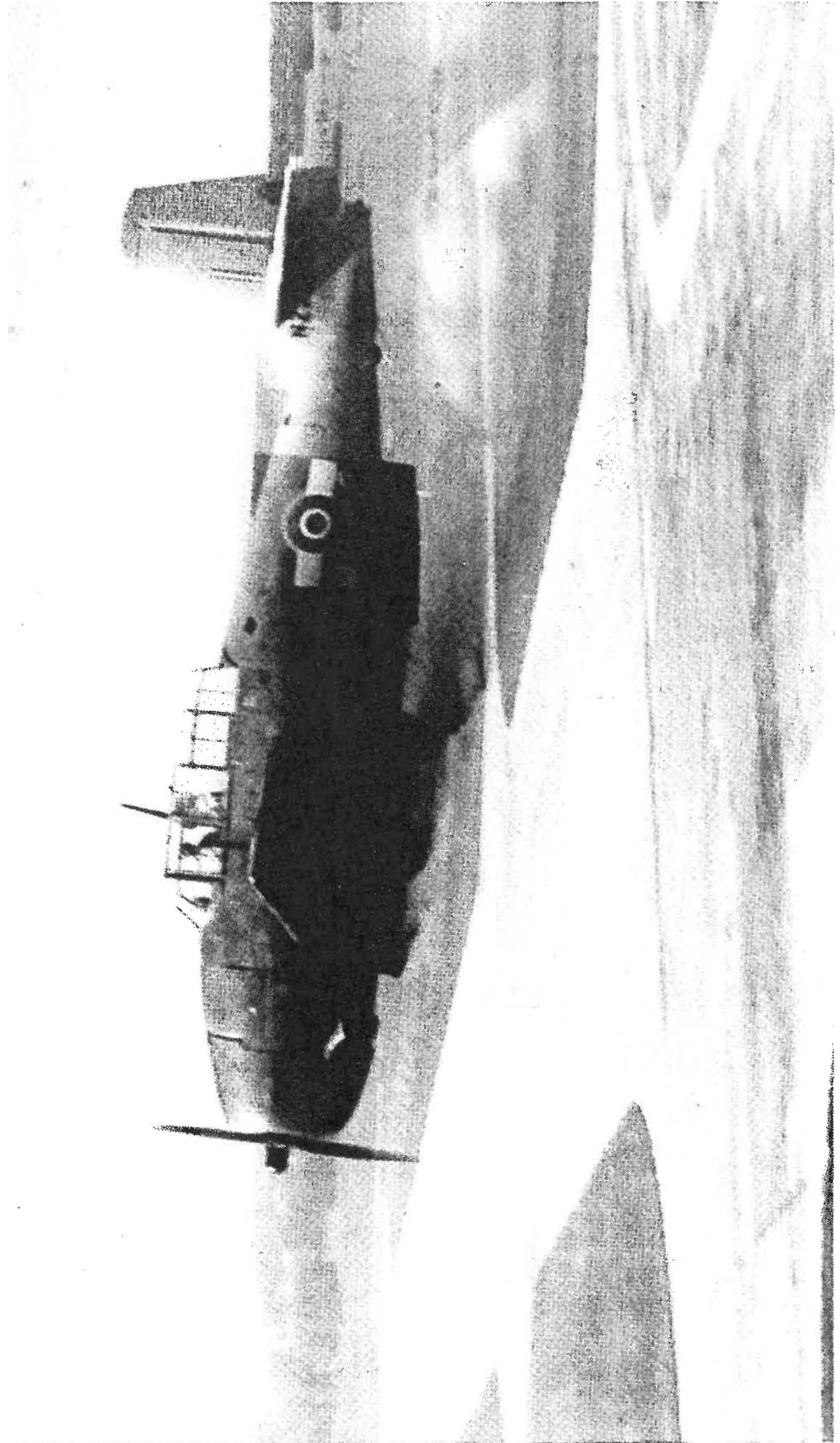
**Te Rapa's Avenger NZ 2504, circa 1970.**

Photograph courtesy of the Waikato Times.



**Avenger NZ 2504 in an earlier life. Undergoing trials as a topdresser,  
September 1946.**

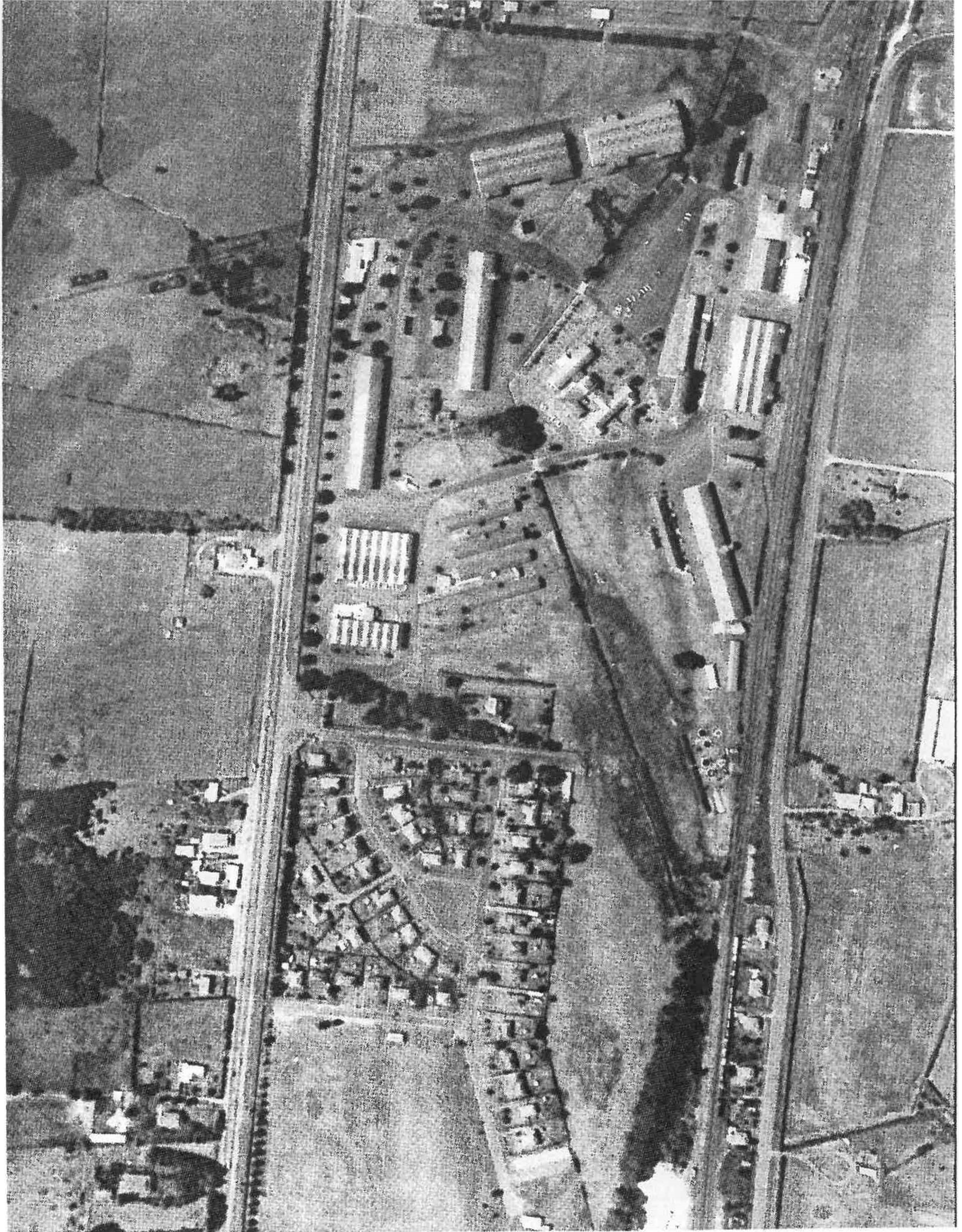
~Photograph courtesy of the Central Photographic Establishment, RNZAF Ohakea.





**RNZAF Te Rapa from the air, March 1970.**

Photograph courtesy of the Central Photographic Establishment, RNZAF Ohakea.



**Vampire NZ 5765 is lowered onto its plinth at Te Rapa in 1984.**

Photograph courtesy of the Waikato Times.





## **INTRODUCTION.**

As a boy growing up in Hamilton in the 1970s, I can remember the hundreds of times we drove past the Te Rapa Air Force Base, and how each time I searched intently for a glimpse of the Grumman Avenger parked inside the gates. Great was my excitement if I ever got a good look, and great was my disappointment when in 1978, the Avenger was removed for a reason beyond my limited understanding.

Also beyond my understanding was the purpose of the Base itself. In spite of my intent gaze on our trips to Auckland, I can seldom recall ever seeing a uniformed serviceman, and I certainly never saw the faintest sign of aircraft landing or taking off, which as every small boy knows, must be the sole purpose for an Air Force Base. Was there an underground airstrip? Or did the Base have some secret purpose which small boys were not permitted to know? Whatever the reason, the Base was a solid existence on the road out of Hamilton towards Auckland, and I, like most other Hamiltonians, accepted its presence without ever really knowing or questioning its true role.

This study will show the purpose of the Te Rapa Base and in discussing its function will also show the wider aspect of the relationship of the Base to the city of Hamilton. The questions of whether the Base adequately filled the role for which it was designed, and why the Base was finally closed down, will be answered as this history of the Air Force supply house unfolds.

## Chapter One

### **THE BEGINNING - In Years of War.**

As the Japanese advanced through the Pacific in early 1942, fears grew rapidly about the likelihood of air raids on the military installations in New Zealand. Since these raids would have to be mounted by carrier-borne aircraft it was thought that the most obvious targets were those in coastal locations. These locations included the large number of Air Force stations in the Auckland area. Mangere, Whenuapai, Hobsonville, and Ardmore were some of the more vital targets with not only operational squadrons, but supply and repair depots all grouped in the same area.

The lesson of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 had a profound effect on the New Zealand military. New Zealanders were determined not to be caught napping in a similar fashion, with naval and air bases huddled closely together inviting attack. Therefore it was decided that No. 1 Stores Depot at Hobsonville would be shifted into the provinces to protect the valuable stores in the event of an air raid on Auckland.

Two possible sites were considered, one in Franklin near Pukekohe and the other in Hamilton. Both sites were south of Auckland, Franklin about fifty kilometres south west, and Hamilton closer to a hundred and fifty kilometres south.

The Franklin site was quickly discarded as it was thought to still be within range of Japanese carrier based aircraft, and was still too close to Auckland to be considered dispersed.

Hamilton therefore seemed the only other viable option and a search began for a suitable site in the area. Within a month a place was found which appeared to fit the criteria. The place was Te Rapa, three miles north of Hamilton, on the east side of the main trunk railway line and astride the main road to Auckland. Although in 1942 the site was occupied by a dairy farm the

positioning seemed ideal for a decentralised supply base. It was not too far from the Auckland bases it would serve, it could be linked into the main trunk line for ease of transport by rail, and it was reasonably close to a town which could supply the local purchasing needs of the new Station.<sup>1</sup>

The local farmer, John Livingstone, gave up sixty five acres of his farm under the requisitioning powers of the Public Works Act and was compensated with a sum of about 45 000 pounds.<sup>2</sup> Approval was immediately granted for the building of the first 25 000 square foot store, and preparations began for the move of the Stores Depot.

Although approval for building had been granted in May 1942, an oversight resulted in no contract being signed until late June.<sup>3</sup> This delay was made up by top priority being given to the new store and two further warehouses at the Te Rapa site. Memos of the time speak of the utmost urgency with which the new stores were to be built, and a corresponding lowering of the priority for the stores also being built at Te Awamutu.<sup>4</sup> The Te Awamutu stores were considered to be in a less advantageous position than the site found at Te Rapa and therefore the No. 4 Stores Depot at Te Awamutu was scaled down and priority shifted to Hamilton and No 1 Stores Depot.

No.1 Stores Depot had been formed in November 1939, just after the outbreak of war in Europe. It had carried out the initial supplying of the RNZAF from the Hobsonville Station.<sup>5</sup> But from the 21st of June 1942 all its operations were to be carried out from Hamilton. On this date the Depot moved into the Winter Show buildings in Ward Street, (the site of the Hamilton public library from 1968 until 1993) with a transport section and more stores in Ebbett's motors on Thackeray street. It would remain in these premises until the buildings at Te Rapa were ready for occupation. Squadron Leader H. G. Wilson was the officer commanding the Stores depot at the time and he oversaw the billeting of the Depot personnel in private accommodation in the Hamilton community.<sup>6</sup>

On the 12th of August 1942 a new Station Headquarters was set up in Cadman's Building in Hamilton's Victoria Street. No. 1 Stores Depot and No. 203 Aerodrome Defence Squadron (A.D.S.) became the amalgamated units of the latest Air Force Station, to be known as RNZAF Station Hamilton.<sup>7</sup>

No. 203 A.D.S. was to have a very shortlived existence. It was formed as a response to the perceived threat of invasion by Japanese forces, and was to protect the Rukuhia airstrip from the invaders. But after the victories by United States forces in the Coral sea and at Midway, the threat faded, and after a two month life the Aerodrome Defence unit was disbanded and in September 1942 its personnel were posted to either Tauranga or Gisborne.<sup>8</sup>

The Rukuhia airstrip had been taken over from the local flying club, and an Air Force construction team was working on the site, but this construction unit was the only Air Force unit in the area not included in the Hamilton Station organisation.

Therefore at the time of the setting up of RNZAF Station Hamilton, the units and their locations were; Station Headquarters in Cadman's building, No .1 Stores Depot mostly in the Waikato Winter Show buildings, and No. 203 A.D.S. in a camp at the Narrows. No 1 Repair Depot became the third lodger unit of Hamilton when it arrived later in the year. Wing Commander E.A. Gibson was in overall command of the Station, although in late September he handed over to Wing Commander. J. T. Brown.

Building continued at great pace in many areas of Hamilton to provide accommodation for the influx of airmen and women without whom the various units could not function. Hutted camps were erected near the Fairfield Bridge and between Clarence and Palmerston Streets where the Trustbank Theatre stands today. The camp at Fairfield Bridge somehow became known as Snake Gully (a name probably stolen from the popular radio show, "Dad and Dave") and the name lingers on even now that the Hamilton Table Tennis Association have built their stadium there. While these camps were built, the

accommodation shortage in town became acute. In September, the advance party of No. 1 Repair Depot arrived from Hobsonville and added to the already considerable problem.<sup>9</sup> Some airmen were housed in the partly completed buildings at Te Rapa without any sort of facilities, while the mess at Snake Gully held three sittings for every meal in an attempt to cope until further buildings could be taken over or built.

With the arrival of the main bulk of the repair unit in October, the Stores depot moved all its equipment and stores from the various garages and showrooms into the Winter Show buildings, and between the end of October 1942 and the 10th of April 1943, moved from there into its new premises at Te Rapa.<sup>10</sup> The Show buildings were taken over by the Repair Depot and utilised by the unit until 1946.

Throughout the remainder of 1943 and into 1944 the building programme at Te Rapa continued working its way towards a target of 150 000 square feet of covered store. Seven large stores of various types were planned, five in 1943 and a further two in 1944, plus a number of smaller buildings for items like pyrotechnics, ammunition and a fire tender.<sup>11</sup> A light railway line was to be laid so stores could be quickly dispatched by rail with a minimum of handling. And accommodation and messing facilities had to be completed for twelve officers and one hundred and seventy six other ranks.<sup>12</sup> But changes to the initial plans were made and remade as problems came and went.

The Station was initially to have been built on both sides of the main highway, but the added problem of placing a railway crossing on State Highway 1, coupled with the swampy ground on the eastern side, meant that this plan was shelved and the main buildings were all placed on the western side of the road. A few small bomb stores were built on the eastern side, mainly to keep the explosives separate from the main stores. These were finally emptied and closed in early 1959.

Problems also arose when the time came to lay the rail sidings

within the camp. Railway track was in short supply during the war, as steel was in great demand for many other uses. Therefore there was some difficulty in obtaining the four kilometres of track which was to form the sidings in the new Station. This length of track had just been pulled up in the Mamaku Bush workings and initially this was to have been used at Te Rapa. But after an initial agreement, the Railways Department decided it did not want to release this to the Air Force. Some considerable delay resulted before the Public Works Department finally procured enough track to proceed with the work.

Meanwhile building was going on at such a pace that the builders got ahead of the planners. The third store to be built was to have a concrete floor at ground level, with a sunken loading bay and large sliding doors. At least this was the original intention. But shortly after approval had been given to start work on this building, the planners decided that Number three store should become a clothing store.<sup>13</sup> Therefore the concrete floor was to become a wooden floor, the loading bay was no longer required and the large doors would be replaced by large windows to improve the lighting. But by the time this order got to the builders there was already a concrete floor, a loading bay and large doors.<sup>14</sup> The loading bay was able to be filled in but Number three store was never really suitable for use as a clothing store, and so an eighth large building was eventually required. Number three site became the bulk store for items too big to be stored anywhere else, and Number eight site was built in the early 1950s to accommodate the clothing in a specialist store.

Positioning of the buildings gave further problems. The original siting of two of the first three stores was changed by the builders, much to the annoyance of James Fletcher, the Commissioner of Defence Construction. The buildings had been sited so that they would be able to make use of the railway link to the main trunk line. If the stores were positioned correctly, goods would be able to be loaded from storage directly into railway wagons. But when Mr. Fletcher inspected, he found that the sites had been changed and were no

longer anywhere near the railway tracks. He was justifiably upset *“that after expending all this money on a siding, these stores are being placed in such a position that the railway facilities are valueless and motor transport to and from these stores would be necessary to service them.”*<sup>15</sup> He therefore gave immediate instructions to stop work on the stores where they were, and re-site them in the original positions. This was done to his satisfaction and the buildings remain in those positions today.

Unfortunately he was unable to improve the site of the accommodation huts. The area for these huts was badly chosen and not enough were built. They were situated in what was the natural drainage area of the site and in wet weather the ground became so boggy it made the huts almost untenable.<sup>16</sup> The situation became so bad that the spot became known as Pigsville and was even referred to by this name in official correspondence.<sup>17</sup>

Overcrowding of the accommodation was also a concern, particularly after the war when Te Rapa was to become a permanent Station. This problem was to persist for many years and was not rectified until the intervention of the Chief of Air Staff in 1946. After his inspection in October of that year, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Cyril Nevill stated in his report that, *“the huts occupied by these airmen are unfit for use. They are overcrowded, insanitary and falling to pieces. If the conditions under which these airmen are living were generally known, it would cause a public scandal. Conditions will become impossible during the next winter unless remedial action is taken.”*<sup>18</sup> Remedial action was taken, but during the war years the airmen suffered in silence. Their problems were of course, slight in comparison to some of those of the New Zealanders serving overseas in operational bases.

But in spite of these problems, Te Rapa was operating efficiently for all the latter years of the war. The bulk of the supplies which moved through the Station were American and were destined for the Pacific Theatre where the New Zealand squadrons operated with predominantly American

equipment. The Repair depot also filled its function adequately as the main repair centre for the RNZAF in New Zealand and the Pacific. The RNZAF units in Hamilton and the resulting large numbers of airmen and women stationed within the local area, served to give the town the appearance of an Air Force camp. Much of the central city was off limits to the general public and even Hamiltonians who were children at the time can remember the restrictions on areas where they had previously roamed at will.<sup>19</sup> This military appearance was in total contrast to the role of Hamilton before the war as the hub of the Waikato dairy industry.

Thus the association of the RNZAF with Hamilton began.

Although a seemingly unlikely place for a military base, yet the area gave good service to the specialised needs of the Air Force. But whether the move from Auckland was necessary and whether the stores should have been left in Hamilton after the war, are questions which should be addressed. The need for separate supply bases and the reasons for their dispersal as seen in the Te Rapa example will be discussed in the following chapter.



<sup>1</sup> RNZAF Station Hamilton, Unit History Sheets, Resume for 1942. National Archives, Wellington.

<sup>2</sup> Air Staff History File, "Closure and History of Te Rapa", File No. A922/46c, P. 4. National Archives, Wellington.

<sup>3</sup> Memo from Commissioner of Defence Construction, to A.O.C. Northern Group, 28th June 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Memo from Director of Repair and Maintenance, 20th April 1943.

<sup>5</sup> Air Dept. General description of RNZAF Station Te Rapa, 2 May 1962. National Archives, Wellington.

<sup>6</sup> RNZAF Station Hamilton, Unit History Sheets, Resume for 1942.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Organisation Memo No. 29, from Director of Organisation and Staff Duties, 31st Aug. 1942.

<sup>10</sup> RNZAF Station Hamilton, Unit History Sheets, Resume for 1942.

<sup>11</sup> Memo to A.O.C. Northern Group HQ, from Air Force Member for Supply, 13th May 1943.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Memo from Commissioner of Defence Construction, to, CO RNZAF Hamilton, 18th April 1943.

<sup>14</sup> Memos from CO RNZAF Hamilton, to, Commissioner of Defence Construction, April 1943.

<sup>15</sup> Memo from Commissioner of Defence Construction to The Air Secretary, 24th Sept. 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Air Department memos, 1944-1946.

<sup>18</sup> Memo from C.A.S. to the Minister of Defence, 11th Nov. 1946.

<sup>19</sup> Interviews with Mrs. Bessie Amner, and Mr. Tom Bryce, Oct. , 1992.

## Chapter Two.

### **CENTRALISED DEPOTS AND DISPERSION** **SENSIBLE OPTIONS?**

An army may march on its stomach, but in the era of flight, an air force flies only as long as it can be supplied with spare parts and other necessary technological bits and pieces. Without parts and supplies, any operating unit would quickly grind to a halt, unable to carry out any of its functions once its equipment could not be repaired or replaced.

This chapter will not continue the chronological record of the Te Rapa Station, but will look at the various supply methods open to an Air Force. In it will be discussed the options for supply as they relate to the RNZAF and the Te Rapa Station in particular.

In order to operate effectively an air force must be assured of a reliable source of supply for all its needs. A reliable source is also a source which can replace items quickly should the need arise, therefore it must have the items already in store as insurance against the possible demand. If for example, an RNZAF aircraft was to suffer a mishap and require a replacement part before it could fly again. If the item had to be ordered from the aircraft manufacturers in some distant country, the delay before its arrival would be considerable. The resulting grounding of the aircraft would be frustrating, inconvenient and expensive. To avoid such delays, it is therefore necessary to hold a considerable number of spare parts where they are easily accessible. There must also be enough control over the supplies to ensure that further stocks can be ordered from the distant manufacturers in time for the next demand.

There are a number of different options in the way the stores problem can be met. When air forces in Europe became autonomous units at the end of the First World War, one assumes, in the absence of evidence, that

these options were assessed.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the RNZAF however, it appears that in the early years the Air Staff simply modelled itself on the example of the British Royal Air Force (RAF).<sup>2</sup> In fact most of the early Chiefs of the Air Staff were RAF officers brought out from Britain to show the New Zealanders how things should be done. With this Imperial influence in place there was never going to be an opportunity for originality in the setting up of the RNZAF.

In spite of this lack of original thought in the early days of the RNZAF it is necessary to examine the options which were available for storage of supplies in the 1940s and 1950s. These were:

- (a) Several small depots near the operational stations they would serve on a regional or individual basis.
- (b) A central depot in a secure remote location from which all bases draw their supplies as needed.
- (c) A central depot situated on one of the operational bases as a separate unit and available to all consumer bases.
- (d) A central store operated by, and located on one of the larger operational bases, yet still available to all other consumers.
- (e) Stores held on every Base, with the primary user of each stock-line holding all of that line.

During the war years, option (a) was the preferred option for the RNZAF. Te Rapa and the other stores depots at Mangaroa in Wellington, Weedons in Christchurch, and Te Awamutu in the Waikato, were set up and thrived. Stores were divided among the depots according to type. Thus Te Rapa held predominantly American spares and supplied the squadrons in the Pacific, as well as the bases within its northern region.

With the end of the war, security from foreign attack remained a high priority and the system of regional depots was maintained. As the RNZAF became smaller, Mangaroa and Te Awamutu were closed and during the 1950s their stores were redistributed to the two remaining regional depots.

Te Rapa became the sole supply depot for the Northern region and Weedons supplied the Southern region. But in the 1958 Defence Review<sup>3</sup> (not 1957,<sup>4</sup> as is commonly recorded<sup>5</sup>) Te Rapa became the sole central depot, serving all the operational consumer bases of the entire RNZAF.

But was this the best decision that could have been made? Closer study suggests that the RNZAF was simply following precedents set by larger air forces without paying close attention to the singular nature of the New Zealand position.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1958 decision, option (b) has been the preferred method of supply in the RNZAF. A single centralised depot at Te Rapa holding stocks of every necessary part which might conceivably be needed some time in the future. This is augmented by small holdings on the operational bases to support the immediate needs of the consumer units.<sup>7</sup>

This centralised depot system is derived from the RAF method which has been in use since the inception of that force on the 1st of April 1918.<sup>8</sup> The main reasons behind the adoption of such a depot are given in the RNZAF Stores Management Review of 1988 and are broadly as follows.

***“Security.** Storage of strategic reserves and bulk stocks away from vulnerable operational bases improves survivability during hostilities. (Although the depot itself may become a target in its own right.)*

***Space.** A military inventory typically consists of a large number of lines including many reserve or insurance items which are only consumed through battle damage or over irregularly spaced maintenance periods... Such items are normally held at a remotely located central depot, to be demanded as required rather than take up space as forward holdings at an operational unit.*

***Multiple Users.** Many spares have several applications. In addition a large number of items with only one application may*

*have several users... Rather than have one user act as wholesaler and retailer, most forces have chosen to have all users draw from a common depot.*

***Economy.*** *Concentration of large inventories into large warehouses, particularly if the items are slow moving, is cheaper than running a lot of smaller stores. Economies of scale prevail.*

***Flexibility.*** *The bulk stockholding function is essentially static in nature. Some of the customer units are deployable and may be required to change their location during hostilities more than once. Having their total static support tied to one operating location is unattractive. Space limitations at operational locations caused by carrying unwanted functions may limit flexibility in expansion or mobility when required.”<sup>9</sup>*

Against these advantages for a central depot there are two major disadvantages. The first of these is the availability of stores and the time in which an item can be made available to the consumer.<sup>10</sup>

Stores are kept on the operational bases in two different situations. The first is for items used in regular maintenance on a day to day basis. These items are held in what is known as the flight store and are immediately available to the aircraft mechanics. The second is the main store on Base which holds commodities to replenish flight store stocks as well as items which are less likely to be needed urgently. Everything else is held in the central depot and can only be made available after an inevitable delay due to the extra distance involved.

It is impossible to foresee all possible stores requirements in advance and have the items ready on the operational Base. Top priority demands from the central depot, such as an item grounding an aircraft until

the part is replaced, can be delivered within six to twenty four hours after the request has been made. Other urgent repair requirements could take between eighteen and forty eight hours, and normal demands would be met within ten to twenty three days.<sup>11</sup> These times are not excessive but can result in a delay and a break in workflow while parts are forwarded from the central depot.

The second drawback is the overheads and costs associated with maintaining a separate Base for warehousing only. Although economies of scale do prevail, the overheads of maintaining the depot can quickly outweigh such small savings.<sup>12</sup>

As has already been mentioned, the central depot system was the brainchild of the RAF. But the RAF in the 1940s and 1950s had a situation vastly different from that of the RNZAF. Within Great Britain there were areas where the threat of air raids from within continental Europe was considerably higher because of the shorter ranges involved. This was shown by the heavy air raids on the south of England during the Battle of Britain and the relatively light attention shown to districts outside the operational radius of the Luftwaffe.

Therefore it made good sense to disperse the virtually defenceless supply depots to areas further away from the air raid threat, in the same way that children from the large cities were dispersed into the countryside to protect them from the raids. Attention to security before all else was perfectly justified in Britain, whether in war or peace.

In New Zealand in 1942 the threat from Japan had seemed very real, yet as the war progressed, the chances of the threat materialising into air raids grew more and more remote. By 1945, the emergence of the United States, not only as the single most powerful force in the Pacific, but also as a friend to New Zealand, had dispelled virtually all possibilities of large scale attack on our shores. There was no longer the need for a supply depot secure from attack in its remoteness. The major considerations for the planners

preparing the post war supply system for the RNZAF should have been cost effectiveness, and efficiency of supply. Instead the Air Staff of the day decided in favour of security and followed the British model in staying with the concept of a central depot.<sup>13</sup>

A further consideration in Britain is the large size of the RAF when compared with the RNZAF. For example, in New Zealand, there might be a need to have a holding of twenty parts of the same type to ensure a year's supply. In a larger force such as the RAF, it may be necessary to hold five hundred of the same part, and twenty bases may need that part at some stage. Thus the much greater stocks of stores necessary to keep the RAF operating are better accommodated in central warehousing where access to stores is equally available to all.

The RNZAF situation was, and still is, that there are a large number of separate lines of stock, but only a few of each stock-line in store. Since all the aircraft of a particular type may all be stationed on one Base, there may be only one operational Base which uses certain of the lines held in the central store. It seems superfluous to put these items into storage in a place distant from where they will be used. Savings could be made on; the cost of transport to the storage depot when the part first arrives, the cost of transport to the operational Base when it is needed, and the time taken for packing and unpacking, if the part was stored closer to where it was eventually to be used.

In support of Te Rapa it must be said, that the rail system operating from within the Base, coupled with the relatively small distances to anywhere in New Zealand, meant that the Base was quite efficient in supplying its consumers. It was therefore not necessary to change the working system for reasons of inefficiency of supply.<sup>14</sup>

But for reasons of cost it would appear that the central depot could probably have been superseded in 1945 by one of the three other options for storage and supply. These options include the use of the existing operational

bases as the storage depots, but in slightly different ways.

Option (c) would be to return to the situation which existed when No. 1 Stores Depot was first formed in 1938. Small holdings of stores would be kept on most bases, but the main stores depot itself would also be on one of the operational bases, preferably the largest, to minimise transport costs. The depot would still operate as a separate unit but would occupy buildings close to its largest customer.

This option would remove most transport costs involved in the dispensing of stores to the largest consumer. It would also reduce costs associated with sending stores to more distant bases as transport aircraft could operate directly from the point of supply without having to incorporate a road or rail link from Te Rapa to Auckland.

If a threat were to arise again, the example of 1942 shows that it is possible to quickly disperse the stores to distant locations in a short period of time. This time is almost certain to be available, given the vast area of the Pacific any enemy would have to cross and conquer before being able to directly threaten New Zealand again.

The major disadvantage of this option is that it involves a large amount of double handling in the distribution of stock even though the distances between supplier and consumer are small. Transport costs only would be reduced, not the time taken to process demands for supply.

Option (d), to maintain a central store under the control of the host Base, has the advantage of making stores readily available to that Base. The store would be essentially a larger version of the main store already held on Base as part of all the other options. The other advantages associated with the depot stationed on the Base, (option (c)) also apply in this situation.

The major disadvantage of this option is that the parts are too accessible to the technicians of the host Base. By being able to simply walk in and demand for stores that they can see in front of them, the normal channels



can be circumvented. This then results in the chaos which was seen in the late sixties when this scheme was tried on a limited scale. Storemen lose track of what stores they hold, too many unnecessary items are eventually held in the forward flight stores, and confusion reigns generally.<sup>15</sup>

The final option is the one which has been adopted by the RNZAF in the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> Rather than being held in a central depot the stores are spread around the various operational bases with the Base that has the most use for any particular stock-line, holding all those items on behalf of the other bases. Computers have only recently made this an acceptable option. A central record of stores can be held on computer without the need for the items themselves to be available in a central location. Dispersal in this manner could have been done in 1945 but without the aid of computers there would have been many problems associated with such a scheme.

The greater number of bases in 1945 would have meant a greater spread of stores and less control over the location of particular items. Time would probably have been fruitlessly spent in hunting for the base that held the particular part required. At least with the central depot there is no doubt about the location of any part that is not available on the operational base. If it cannot be found on Base then it must be in the central depot.

Until the advent of computers there was no way to keep a central record of dispersed stocks which could be accessed easily and quickly by any consumer. Therefore in the days before computers, stockholdings were easier to access if they were held in a central depot. The lack of an accessible inventory was a major reason why the holding of stores on the forward bases was not a viable option in the early years of the RNZAF, and a major factor behind the retention of Te Rapa as a permanent Station existing solely for the purposes of supply.<sup>17</sup>

In 1945 and for many years after the war, the dispersal of stores to the bases was not a particularly attractive option. But in 1965 it was attempted

Readers of this work are advised to note the following special comment by the Chairman of the Museum Trust Board.

On page 28, the author makes certain adverse comments on practices at RNZAF Base Auckland during the trial of a new "forward holding" stores system. Such comments may well have arisen from the inputs of some retired RNZAF equipment officers who, at the time, probably saw the "forward holding" system as a serious threat to the future of Te Rapa as No 1 Stores Depot.

However, the assertions made do appear to reflect on the professionalism of those equipment officers at the base level who were trying to make the new system work and should be viewed with reserve. The professionalism and efficiency of the base officers concerned was in fact never in question. The "forward holding" of the Depot stores in fact produced quite satisfactory results - and with the recent closure of Te Rapa has now been adopted as a permanent concept.

If there were some frustrations and difficulties in the stores/supply area during the period in question, this was probably a consequence of the RNZAF introducing new aircraft types at that time - and possibly the introduction of computers in the processes of inventory management and control.

The purpose of this special note is simply to correct any wrong impressions about the effectiveness of the "forward holding" stores concept - and to protect the excellent reputation of the RNZAF equipment officers serving at Base Auckland when the trials were taking place.

Sir R.B. Bolt  
Chairman  
RNZAF Museum Trust Board

on a limited scale. All the aeronautical spares were sent to Auckland to be nearer the aircraft. This experiment became a disaster. Because the stores were so accessible to the technicians, they went to the store and simply took what they needed. Proper records were not kept and items were not stored in any logical sequence. The stores were not held proper accommodation but were simply shoved into an empty hangar. After a five year period all the parts were returned to Te Rapa. The 250,000 lines of stock were in such a chaotic state that it was a further eight months before they were sorted into a reasonable semblance of order.<sup>18</sup>

In 1945 there was the need for some form of central control over the distribution of stores to the various consumer stations of the RNZAF. Although the central warehouses could have returned to Hobsonville to make the most of the transport arrangements available there, the option of remaining at Te Rapa was made viable by the fact that there was no shortage of money for defence purposes. The recent war was still clear enough in the public memory for people not to argue about allocation of funds to a central supply Base of the RNZAF.

So with the end of the war, Te Rapa settled down to a low key existence as the permanent supply depot for the northern region. Weedons in Christchurch was tasked with supplying the southern region and became the only other permanent supply depot for the Air Force. As the other stores were closed down or amalgamated into other units, Te Rapa became more and more vital to the running of the RNZAF.

On the 1st of January 1948, the Te Awamutu depot ceased functioning as a separate unit and came under the command of what was now RNZAF Station Te Rapa.<sup>19</sup> In 1949 all aircraft spares from Mangaroa in Wellington were transferred to Te Rapa, and Mangaroa was closed.<sup>20</sup> Rukuhia Aerodrome was designated a storage park for surplus aircraft and also came under command of Te Rapa.<sup>21</sup> In 1946 No. 1 Repair depot closed up

shop in the Winter Show Buildings and headed for Ohakea, leaving only a small section in the Rukuhia buildings under Te Rapa's command.<sup>2</sup>

Hamilton ceased to look like an Air Force camp and gradually returned to its original function serving the farming needs of the Waikato region. But three miles out of town on the road to Auckland the Te Rapa supply Base remained as the Air Force legacy to Hamilton. The Te Rapa Station was to remain for fifty years carrying out its function, and yet perplexing the general public about its purpose in the overall military scheme in New Zealand.

<sup>1</sup> Cooper, Malcolm, The Birth of Independent Air Power, London, 1986, p.285.

<sup>2</sup> Wg/Comdr. J. Worden, "RNZAF Stores Management Review", 1988, History file RNZAF Te Rapa, National Archives, Auckland. p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Review of Defence Policy, 1958, Appendices to the Journals of the House, 1958, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Review of Defence Policy, 1957, Appendices to the Journals of the House, 1957.

<sup>5</sup> Air Department, "General Description of RNZAF Station Te Rapa", May, 1962, and every programme for an official event since 1962.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Sqn/Ldr. B. Urquhart, Operation Restore Project Officer, 15th Oct. 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Air Department, "General Description of RNZAF Station Te Rapa", May, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Cooper, opcit, p. 285.

<sup>9</sup> "RNZAF Stores Management Review", opcit, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> "RNZAF Stores Management Review", opcit, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Wg/Comdr.(Ret.) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews with Wg/Comdr.(Ret.) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992, Wg/Comdr.(Ret) E.K. Marr, 22nd July 1992, and F/Sgt. (Ret.) P. J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Memo for widest distribution from Air Vice Marshall P.R. Adamson, 17th April 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Interviews with Wg/Comdr. J.B. McLean, Air Force Director of Supply, and Sqn/Ldr. B. Urquhart, 15th Oct. 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Wg/Comdr.(Ret.) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992, Wg/Comdr.(Ret) E.K. Marr, 22nd July 1992, and F/Sgt. (Ret.) P. J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992.

<sup>19</sup> RNZAF Station Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, January 1948.

The official designation of Te Rapa was RNZAF Station Te Rapa. The title "Base" did not apply until after a reorganisation in Sep. 1965. Unit History Sheets, Sep. 1965.

<sup>20</sup> F/Sgt. M. Steel, "Formation of RNZAF Stores Depots", Base Te Rapa Closure Ceremonies, Official Programme, 1992

<sup>21</sup> Administration instruction no. 47, Director of Organisation and Staff Duties, 5th June 1944.

<sup>22</sup> RNZAF Station Hamilton, Unit History Sheets, March 1946.

### Chapter Three.

#### CHANGES THROUGH THE YEARS.

It is perhaps an over simplification to cover fifty years of operations by an airforce Base in a single chapter, but most of what happened at Te Rapa was the mundane work of keeping the rest of the Air Force operating efficiently. Stores were ordered, received, unpacked, distributed to the warehouses and held until required. When they were demanded by a consumer, they were packed and dispatched and the cycle began again.

The major changes in this routine were the changes in aircraft operated by the RNZAF. In the years since the end of World War Two the RNZAF has operated more than forty different types of aircraft.<sup>1</sup> Each of these has had a large number of spare parts which have all been held at Te Rapa.

The influx of spares when a new aircraft is purchased can be considerable. In 1976-1978 when the nine Andovers arrived, there came with them 25,000 spares.<sup>2</sup> These spares will not be listed, and the routine changes involved with the turnover in aircraft will not be looked at. But the more significant events in the peaceful years of Te Rapa's existence will get some sort of coverage in the following chapter.

At the end of the war, Te Rapa was still little more than a dump. In the words of a corporal recently arrived from England in the early fifties, *"Te Rapa was just a lot of queer sheds put together... I couldn't believe my eyes."*<sup>3</sup> Every spare space was covered with crates and aeroplane parts which could not be fitted under cover. In 1945, some of the operational aircraft had some rather large spare parts. The wing of a Catalina flying boat, for example, was almost thirty two metres long and took up quite a bit of space.<sup>4</sup> It was items like these which lay about outside, becoming less and less usable.

The living quarters were substandard and the messing facilities were not much better. Meals for the various messes had to be carried in hot

boxes (a type of large thermos flask) from the kitchens to the dining rooms.<sup>5</sup> This type of service does not generally lend itself to particularly appetising meals, and Te Rapa's were no exception to this rule.

On one occasion shortly after the war, a well intentioned officer, Flt/Lt. Evans, decided to brighten the diet of the airmen on duty at the Station over the Christmas period. He purchased eight punnets of strawberries for their consumption, and tried to obtain reimbursement from the rationing division at Air Department. Unfortunately, strawberries were definitely not an approved part of an airman's diet in the 1940s, and poor Evans was obliged to pay for his extravagance out of his own pocket.<sup>6</sup>

Twenty man huts abounded on the Station and served not only as accommodation but as store huts, dining rooms, recreation rooms, and offices. These temporary huts remained long after Te Rapa had become a permanent fixture and were still being used for accommodation in 1959. In September of that year the airwomen finally moved out of the huts into a converted section of the airman's barracks and the notorious twenty man huts bid farewell to their last occupants.<sup>7</sup>

The airmen had been rehoused in 1948, in spare barrack blocks brought from Ardmore. The intervention of the Chief of Air Staff on their behalf had made this possible, otherwise they too might have had to wait until 1959.<sup>8</sup> In March of 1948, three blocks of barrack accommodation arrived and were erected on what was the cricket pitch. These provided single rooms for about thirty five officers and senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and one hundred and twenty other ranks.<sup>9</sup>

Building continued for many years in an attempt to make the rough and ready spartan camp into a comfortable place to live and work. An area was set aside on which to build houses for married couples. These houses were to supplement the Livingstone's original farmhouse, which became the residence of the Base Commander and was designated Married Quarter No. 1.

In 1949 the first four of these houses were approved and built, at a cost of about 3,500 pounds each.<sup>10</sup> Over the next five years a further forty houses were completed on the site adjacent to the Station, plus eleven others which were built in Hockin Place, in the suburb of Fairfield, as part of the Government Housing Block.<sup>11</sup>

In the mid 1950s the mess facilities were improved with a new kitchen serving the dining rooms of the officer's mess, the senior NCO's mess and the other ranks mess. The officer and senior NCO messes were placed on the northern side of the kitchen, and the Combined mess for all other ranks was built on the southern side. The kitchen could thus cook for all three groups without significantly dividing its manpower.

While the rest of the camp changed, the actual storage facilities remained much as they were when they were first built. But there were some changes in the use to which they were put. In the early years, there was no central transit site. This was because the railway sidings, running throughout the Station, connected each store to the main trunk line. Every store was responsible for receiving and dispatching all the stores that came under its jurisdiction. This created extra work for the staff of the individual stores. Not only did they have to look after the items in their warehouse, they also had to unpack them when they arrived and repack them when they departed.

This was deemed inefficient, so No. 1 store was transformed into a transit site. Items would arrive there, be unpacked and then distributed to the stores where they would be held until required. When they were needed on an operational Base, they would be sent from the store to the transit site, where they would be packed and dispatched.

This system reduced the need for the railway sidings to reach everywhere on the Station and eventually only the transit site was served by the train. While the rail system was at its peak however, there were eight kilometres of track in the Base and two small shunting locomotives.<sup>12</sup> For



many years the railway gave sterling service, despite the odd mishap connected with the engine. A certain Aircraftman Shotton (in later years to be Commanding Officer (C.O.) of the Base) discovered that his large hand trolley should not be left standing across the tracks, as it was no match for the train in the resulting collision.<sup>13</sup> Two other aircraftmen found that a railway wagon is not the most pleasant place for a good night's sleep. A dutiful sergeant, at five o'clock, assuming that everyone had gone home for the night, slammed the open door of the wagon, condemning two hardworking airmen to a chilly night trapped inside.<sup>14</sup>

By creating a specialist transit site the workload of staff in the stores was markedly reduced. The original occupants of No. 1 site, the small tools, were moved into No. 2 site with the rest of the engineering stores, including huge numbers of nuts and bolts. No. 2 site also held all the spare engines and engine parts for the various aircraft in service with the RNZAF.

The nuts and bolts held in this store came in two types, British and American, and neither type was compatible with the other. After the war the American sized nuts and bolts were sold off cheaply as the Air Force reverted back to British equipment. But in the 1950s and 1960s American aircraft began to appear in the RNZAF again, and there was a sudden need for the American fasteners. The gentleman who had bought the huge excess stock from Te Rapa was approached and was quite happy to sell his holdings back to the Air Force, albeit at a large profit.<sup>15</sup>

The nuts and bolts also created problems in other ways. The racks for these small items were about ten feet wide and ran across the width of the store. The officer in command of the store decided, that in order to ensure no-one was having a break out of sight between the racks, he would change this configuration. He would have the racks cut in half and run lengthwise down the store so that he could see between them from his office. This was a great idea, until the reduced width of the racks caused them to fall over, creating an

avalanche of nuts and bolts, and a severe headache for the unfortunate store commander.<sup>16</sup>

No. 3 site, although originally intended to be the clothing store, actually became the bulk store. In here was stored any item too big to sit on a rack in a normal warehouse. This would include parts like airframes and wings. This was particularly necessary between 1944 and 1967 when spares were being kept for the Sunderland flying boats, and other aircraft of larger than normal size.

No. 4 site was the store which was popular as a showpiece for visitors. It contained all the electrical items, including radar parts, sonar buoys, and radios. No. 4 actually looked like a proper store, or at least, what a proper store should look like in the eyes of the uninitiated. Neat racks, and lots of small boxes stacked in a neat and orderly fashion gave the impression of a well kept stores depot. Therefore this was the store that visitors would be shown if the Base commander wanted to make a favourable impression.<sup>17</sup>

No. 5 site was home to all the goods that needed to be held in some sort of controlled environment. Tyres, rubber seals and rubber dinghies were some of the rubber goods that had to be kept in a cool and dark place. These were kept in No. 5 store and were watched carefully and turned regularly. Parachutes and other specialised items sensitive to light and heat were also stored there.

Just like in the nuts and bolts incident, people would often arrive with ideas for how equipment should be stored, and No. 5 site was no exception. One commander of the site decided that all the tyres should be stacked in the racks according to type, rather than according to size. So, for example, all the Harvard tyres would be in their own rack stacked from the floor to the ceiling, and all the Dakota tyres would have their individual rack from floor to ceiling. This sounds good in theory, but the problem was that some of these tyres were very large, and when they were stacked too high, the racks became very

unstable and eventually collapsed. Good ideas like this were quickly discarded and the tyres were stacked with big ones on the bottom shelves and little ones on top.<sup>18</sup>

No. 6 site contained all the airframe spares that could be fitted into racks. These would include most of the spares for smaller aircraft like the trainers, fighters, ground attack aircraft and helicopters. Airtrainers, Strikemasters, Skyhawks, and Iroquois during the 1990s, and in earlier years, Tiger Moths, Corsairs and Vampires.<sup>19</sup>

No. 7 site was not used as a store after about 1963. As the Air Force diminished after the war years so too did the number of stores. No.7 therefore gave up its role as the second airframe store and became the gymnasium. It was not a particularly good gym, and a number of sports could not be played in it because of the low ceiling height, and the concrete floor. But it did provide a place where the keen and enthusiastic could do press-ups, or shoot baskets.

The gym was also used on occasion as a transit store if a large consignment of stock arrived and could not be accommodated in the regular stores. It also doubled as a dance hall for large social gatherings like Interbase tournaments and was therefore the most versatile of all the buildings on site.

On one occasion in 1989, the Gym was even taken over by the Hamilton Police as a secret location in which to cache more than thirty stolen vehicles. These had been recovered in a major operation which had broken a large car theft ring in Hamilton.<sup>20</sup> The gym was used to store the evidence, much to the chagrin of a group of airmen who were trying to decorate the building for the No 1 stores Depot Reunion ball. Fortunately the Police removed their cars in just enough time for the ball to go ahead.<sup>21</sup>

No.8 store was built after the war as a specialist clothing store and held all the clothing for the RNZAF plus some of the clothes for the army and the navy. The tailor in residence was responsible for ensuring that all the cloth

purchases were up to the standard required, and also that the clothes were acceptable after being made by the civilian contractors. Also in No. 8 store were small valuable items like medals. These were kept under lock and key to discourage would-be collectors from beginning a collection at the Air Force's expense.

Pilfering of stores such as these was not a major problem on the Base. Although items like medals were attractive, most of the stores were not of much use outside their specific application. If someone did manage to get away with a Harvard wing under his arm, what could he possibly do with it?

A slightly more relevant problem was abuse of the disposal system. When items were no longer required by the Air Force, they were sold at auction by the disposals section. If a serviceman wanted an item like a radio, all he needed to do was remove several vital parts from a set that was to be sold. When the auction was held, the enterprising airman bought the radio cheap because it did not work. He then replaced the missing pieces and had acquired a perfectly good and very cheap radio set.<sup>22</sup>

Pilfering was not a major problem, but in 1956 an officer was court martialled and demoted for raking off some of the money from the disposal of surplus items.<sup>23</sup>

The years continued to pass and Te Rapa continued to be improved, particularly as it became more and more vital to the Air Force. The 1958 defence review established Te Rapa as the sole supply depot for the RNZAF.<sup>24</sup> Weedons in Christchurch, which had been serving the Southern region, was therefore closed down and all stock was transferred to Te Rapa.

With its recognition as the only Air Force supply Base in New Zealand, Te Rapa began to establish a unique identity of its own. In 1961 the Station was presented with its official badge and motto. The motto- "Ma Te Rourou E Rato Ai", is loosely translated as, "By Supply We Serve", although it is more accurately interpreted as, To Serve or Provide from the Small Basket.

The serving and providing was the main function of the Station, but it could not have been done without effective recording and accounting. Throughout the years there were significant changes in the way this was done. Initially of course all accounting was done manually and was very labour intensive. In 1959 machine accounting was phased in and in the early sixties a data processing school was set up at Te Rapa. This system was to continue until 1988, when the last data processing transaction took place. Computer accounting took over and Data Processors were phased out of the Air Force.

With the advent of computers, the provisioning responsibilities were moved to RNZAF Headquarters in Wellington. The provisioning had been done at Te Rapa until 1980, but with computerised records the reordering of stores did not need to be done from the Base. The consumption of stores could be recorded in Wellington and replacements ordered from there, thus removing a large workload from the Te Rapa personnel.

In 1965 a major reorganisation took place and Te Rapa ceased to be known as a Station. The new title of RNZAF Base Te Rapa came into effect on the first of September 1965.<sup>25</sup> The “new” Base had as its lodger unit, No. 1 Stores Depot, which in theory was able to move to a new location, should the need arise. The supply Base would remain in its static location, but the lodger unit was to retain the capability to move to a forward Base as support for the operational squadrons. This was the theory, but in practice this was impractical, and to all intents and purposes No. 1 Stores Depot was a permanent fixture at Te Rapa.<sup>26</sup> In 1972 this was recognised and the Base and the Stores depot came under unified command.<sup>27</sup>

For many years, another fixture at the Base was the most obvious sign of an airforce presence at Te Rapa. This was a veteran aeroplane sitting in sight of the main road, a World War Two, TBF Avenger, NZ 2504. Contrary to popular belief, TBF does not stand for Torpedo Bomber Fighter. Torpedo Bomber is correct but the F is actually the designation given to the Grumman Aircraft

Manufacturers. Therefore the TBF Avenger was a Grumman Torpedo Bomber, the largest single engine aircraft of World War Two.

The Avenger was allotted to Te Rapa in July of 1959, and created a small stir among the Station staff when the C.O., Wing Commander E. G. King, had a concrete platform built for the aircraft to stand upon. This platform was paid for from the Base Welfare Fund, which is normally used to fund social events and extramural activities like sports. The decision to pay for this platform was made by the C.O. and was not hugely popular with some of the Station personnel.<sup>28</sup>

What was popular was the bomb bay of the Avenger. It was quite spacious and could accommodate either several people finishing a party after the clubs had closed, or a couple seeking the sort of privacy that could not be legally found in the barracks.

Although it had many uses, eventually the Avenger had to leave. The establishment of an Air Force museum at Wigram meant that the Avenger could be restored to its former glory, and receive the attention it deserved in the public eye. So in October 1978 the old aircraft was moved by road to Auckland and was there loaded on to HMNZS *Waikato* for the trip to Christchurch.<sup>29</sup>

Once at Wigram the work of restoration began. As with any restoration job on an old aircraft, there were a number of parts missing which had to be found and replaced. One was a rubber seal for the rear undercarriage oleo leg. The restorers despaired of ever finding a suitable seal, until they found the part number in the aircraft's manual. They entered this number into the computer and found that Te Rapa still held a considerable number of these seals in stock, twenty years after the Avenger had gone out of service!<sup>30</sup>

Since the Avenger was a carrier borne aircraft it had the ability to fold its wings for storage. Another missing part was one of the hydraulic selector valves which was vital to the wing folding mechanism. Exhaustive enquiries eventually turned up this item as well. It was an integral part of the

mechanism which raised and lowered the boom at the main gate of the Te Rapa Base. The Base policemen swapped their ingenious device for a valve from a Canberra bomber, and the Avenger part was returned to its original owner.<sup>31</sup>

A replacement for the Avenger was not found until 1984, when a De Havilland Vampire flew in to Rukuhia and was towed from there to Te Rapa, where it was mounted on a specially built plinth. The Vampire was a single seat, all wood, jet aircraft which saw service in the RNZAF between 1951 and 1972. Vampire NZ 5765 was to remain on its plinth until its removal to Wigram in 1992.

These were not the only aircraft to visit Te Rapa. There was no airfield where fixed wing aircraft could land, but after 1966, helicopters could and did, land on a landing zone between the main road and No. 6 site.

By the 1990s Te Rapa had become a self contained village, providing a comfortable atmosphere in which its staff could work. The accommodation and mess facilities bore no resemblance to those which had elicited such horror from Corporal Crawford in the fifties. The meals produced in the Te Rapa kitchens now had a reputation as some of the best to be tasted at any military camp in New Zealand. The barrack rooms were as good as could be expected from this type of accommodation, and the various clubs were comfortable and attractive.

In its later years, Te Rapa was seen as a very comfortable place to work, particularly if one was nearing the end of a career in the Air Force. A number of servicemen served out the twilight of their careers at Te Rapa and eventually retired into the Hamilton community.<sup>32</sup>

Life was lived at a slower pace than on an operational Base but it made an atmosphere which was enjoyable for most people who worked there. There were those who found it too quiet and couldn't wait to leave, but the vast majority of those who worked at Te Rapa found it an enjoyable place to be posted.<sup>33</sup>

This pace was paralleled in the city of Hamilton, which although a thriving and fast growing community, still retained its image as a country town where the pace of life was slower than that of a larger city. The following chapter will look at the Base and its relationship with the city of Hamilton.



<sup>1</sup> see Appendix C, or, Burgess, Michael, Aircraft of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, Dunedin, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> NZ Herald, "RNZAF at Te Rapa since 1943", Section 3, page 16, 4th Feb. 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with K. Crawford, 30th Nov. 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Burgess, opcit. p.15.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews with F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, and K. Crawford, 30th Nov.. 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Memo from C.O. RNZAF Te Rapa, to Air Department, Jan. 1948, and, Memo from Air Dept. to C.O. RNZAF Te Rapa, Jan. 1948.

<sup>7</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa Unit History Sheets, Sep. 1959.

<sup>8</sup> Memo from C.A.S. to the Minister of Defence, 11th Nov. 1946.

<sup>9</sup> Waikato Times, "New Blocks for Air Force Station", 2nd Jan. 1948.

<sup>10</sup> Public Works and Development File, 23/765, Buildings, April 1949.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Air Dept. General description of RNZAF Station Te Rapa, 2nd May 1962.

<sup>12</sup> No. 1 Stores Depot, 50th Anniversary Reunion Programme, 1989, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Wg/Comdr.(Ret) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with Wg/Comdr.(Ret) E.K. Marr, 22nd July 1992, and W.O.(Ret) F. Bailey, 23rd July 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Wg/Comdr.(Ret) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992.

<sup>19</sup> see Appendix C.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Det.Sgt. Bruce Currie, Hamilton Police, 16th Dec. 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with, F/Sgt. M. Steel, F/Sgt. S. Martinsen, F/Sgt. T. Dragovich, Cpl. P. Darke, Cpl. M. Green, 15th Oct. 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992.

<sup>23</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, July, 1956.

<sup>24</sup> Review of Defence Policy, 1958, Appendices to the Journals of the House, 1958, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, Sep. 1965.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Wg/Comdr.(Ret) E.K. Marr, 22nd July 1992.

<sup>27</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, June 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with W.O. (Ret) F. Bailey, 23rd July 1992.

<sup>29</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, Oct. 1978.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Sqn/Ldr. P. Harrison, 14th Oct. 1992.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Interviews with, W.O. (Ret) F. Bailey, 23rd July 1992, F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992, Wg/Comdr.(Ret) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992, Wg/Comdr.(Ret) T. J. Kelly MBE, 25th Jan. 1993, and, Wg/Comdr.(Ret) E.K. Marr, 22nd July 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with, W.O. (Ret) F. Bailey, 23rd July 1992, F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992, Wg/Comdr.(Ret) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992, Wg/Comdr.(Ret) E.K. Marr, 22nd July 1992, Wg/Comdr.(Ret) T. J. Kelly MBE, 25th Jan. 1993, Wg/Comdr. J.B. McLean, Sqn/Ldr. B. Urquhart, 15th Oct. 1992, and, F/Sgt. M. Steel, F/Sgt. S. Martinsen, F/Sgt. T. Dragovich, Cpl. P. Darke, Cpl. M. Green, 15th Oct. 1992.

## Chapter Four.

**TE RAPA AND THE WAIKATO.**

In 1941 Hamilton's population was estimated at about 20,900 people.<sup>1</sup> The Hamilton borough was the centre of the Waikato region and served the surrounding dairy farms as the main urban centre. While operating as an Air Force camp during the war years, Hamilton continued to grow, and by 1945 had a population of 27,319.<sup>2</sup> By 1961 this had grown to 50,505 and Hamilton was the third fastest growing area in New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> By the time the Base was closed in 1992, Hamilton was a city of well over a hundred thousand people. In the fifty years between the opening and closing of the Te Rapa Base, the Air Force was to have a noticeable influence on Hamilton and the greater Waikato region.

Before 1962 the Station tended to keep to itself. Hamilton was three miles away and few people had cars on the Station. Supplies were bought in town but there was little other interaction between civilians and the military. However there were occasions when the Station was required to provide assistance to the community, particularly during civil emergencies.

In 1958 one such emergency arose, along with the waters of the Waikato and Waipa rivers. Floods have long been a problem in the central North Island and this one struck the King Country town of Otorohanga. On the 25th of February a group of airmen from Te Rapa travelled to Otorohanga to assist with the rescue and evacuation of residents. For three days they battled the floodwaters with a mobile pumping unit from the Station. Huntly and Ngaruawahia were also threatened with flooding and emergency accommodation was prepared at the Station. Fortunately this was not required and life settled back into a regular routine.<sup>4</sup>

Happier events, such as Hamilton's festival week in March 1961, were also attended by personnel from the Station. A large float displaying the

work of the RNZAF in general and the Te Rapa Station in particular, was entered in the parade down Victoria Street.<sup>5</sup> This must have had some effect in raising the awareness of the people of Hamilton to the role of the Air Force on their doorstep, because as the sixties continued, the relationship between the city and the Station grew closer than ever before.

In 1962, the Hamilton City Council began to show this new awareness of the military presence on the edge of town. The site was now no longer separated from Hamilton by a distance of three miles. Industrial buildings had been gradually spreading down the road between Hamilton and the Station, until on the 1st of June 1962, Te Rapa was officially incorporated into the city.<sup>6</sup> The Te Rapa area was to become the home of industry in Hamilton and by 1992 the industrial area had reached and spread north of the Base.

Two weeks later, on the 13th of June, a special meeting of the City Council decided to confer the Freedom of the City on the Te Rapa Station.<sup>7</sup> This Charter entitled the Station personnel to march through the city of Hamilton once a year, with drums beating, band playing, colours flying, bayonets fixed and swords drawn.<sup>8</sup> On the 10th of November 1962 this right was exercised for the first time, and the Charter was presented by the Mayor, Dr. Denis Rogers.<sup>9</sup>

From this time on, RNZAF Station Te Rapa, (and after the 1965 reorganisation, RNZAF Base Te Rapa) enjoyed cordial relations with the City. The right to parade was exercised every year and Te Rapa created a precedent in 1982 by staging the official handover of the Queen's colour in the city, rather than on Base.<sup>10</sup> The RNZAF Queen's colour is held in turn by each of the RNZAF Bases in New Zealand and is ceremonially handed on to the next Base at the end of each tenure. To create a major break with tradition by having the handover ceremony in town, showed the close relationship between the Base and the people of Hamilton. Other official occasions such as the opening of the University of Waikato in 1965, or visits by royalty or foreign dignitaries, always

involved personnel from the Base in an official attendance, as guests, and often also as security.

The Base reciprocated by providing a unique service to the Hamilton community. School pupils made numerous requests over the years for information ranging from, navigation information for a physics project, to advice on how to build a bomb.<sup>11</sup> These requests were handled with great courtesy, and every one was answered or referred to the proper source.

The Base was also greatly involved in assisting the local Air Training Corps, No. 7 ATC, and the various air scouts and similar groups which existed in the area. Transport was provided on numerous occasions to take scouts or cadets on trips or camps.

Te Rapa school also benefited from its close association with the Base, using the grounds for school events like calf day, and utilising personnel and transport for various school activities such as working bees.<sup>12</sup>

Hamilton as a whole, benefited financially from the presence of the Base. Food supplies were all bought locally as were other commodities for the day to day running of the Te Rapa community. On one occasion the Base Commander wanted a bow and arrow set for his young son's birthday. Being busy, he asked his secretary to find one in a local shop. She did this by phoning a toy shop and asking, as was her habit, "Te Rapa Air Force Base here, do you have any bows and arrows?" A long silence followed, after which a voice on the other end replied, "Well I knew there had been cutbacks, but I didn't realise they'd gone that far!"<sup>13</sup>

Expenditure by Base personnel was of great benefit to the city. In 1978 it was estimated that the Base brought about \$ 850,000 into the community each year.<sup>14</sup> By 1991 this estimate had grown to a figure closer to five million dollars, including both personal spending and over two million dollars expended merely to operate the Base.<sup>15</sup> This does not include the contracts for the manufacture of service clothing which were also a considerable investment

in the local community. With this sort of expenditure it was in the best interests of the Hamilton business community to keep on good terms with the Air Force.

Therefore when the city council members continued their association under the terms of the Charter, by engaging in visits to the Base, they were often accompanied by prominent businessmen from the Hamilton community. These visitors gained an appreciation of the work the Air Force was engaged in at Te Rapa, but the wider public still had little awareness of the function of the Base.

Various Base Commanders were concerned by this lack of awareness and often attempted to rectify the situation by making speeches on the role of Te Rapa to a number of interested groups in the community.<sup>16</sup> The Base also got involved in activities which could raise the profile of the Air Force in the region. These included setting up stands at events like the Winter Show in the Claudelands Showgrounds,<sup>17</sup> and Hamilton Founders day in 1983 where a display was mounted in Garden Place.<sup>18</sup>

The major event of this type was held in 1982 when Te Rapa staged an open day at the Base. This was timed to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the Base and was held on the 11th of December. Activities included air displays, the Pipe Band performing, and tours of the Base buildings. The day's profits, totalling \$ 2,500, went to the new RNZAF Museum at Wigram.

The availability of Base personnel for civil emergencies continued with a contingency team ready for whatever situation might arise. This team rehearsed regularly with the local police and was called out on a number of occasions. These included further floods at Ngatea, Huntly, Paeroa, Rangiriri, Thames, and again in Paeroa. In 1978 the police requested assistance from the Base, as they carried out a search for a kidnapper and his victim in bush south of Piopio.<sup>19</sup> When an English tourist, Margery Hopegood, was murdered in

Hamilton in 1992, the Base contingency team rose to the occasion once more, and took part in the search for clues along the Waikato riverbank.<sup>20</sup>

The Base fire crew were not to be left out of the action, although there was usually little for them to do except polish their fire engine. A huge fire broke out in the New Zealand Co-operative Dairy Company milk store in 1963. The fire tender and thirty six men were called out, and remained all night assisting the local fire brigades to douse the blaze.<sup>21</sup>

But disasters and emergencies were not the only times that the Base ventured into the community. The catering flight were called on to provide meals for the volunteers at Telethon in 1976, and in 1978 provided support for the World Rowing Champs at Lake Karapiro.

Every year on ANZAC Day, there would be representatives from the Te Rapa Base at a number of commemorations throughout the Waikato. Ngatea, Ohaupo, Raglan, Te Kauwhata, Matamata, Tauranga, Huntly, Morrinsville, Ngaruawahia and Hamilton all saw the RNZAF uniforms at their parades. The charter parade through Hamilton every year also displayed the Air Force blues to the public.

But in spite of these liaisons with the local community, the profile of the Base was still very low. Because it looked sleepy and deserted most of the time, many people of Hamilton assumed that it was deserted. Indeed one person expressed surprise when told of the closure of the Base, because they thought it had been closed for years!

The awareness of defence issues also tends to be low in the Waikato. There are few military camps in the region and few regular force military personnel. Apart from the recruiting staff at the Knox Street Army Hall in Hamilton, the Te Rapa Base and the Hopuhopu Army Base provided the only military presence in the region. Since both these establishments were low profile and easily forgotten, the military have not been a major talking point in the central North Island.

But Te Rapa could do its job without public recognition and did so for fifty years. On the occasions they were needed to assist the local community, the Air Force people were willing to help. When the military was not popular, as during the Vietnam era, or the 1981 Springbok tour, they merely tightened security and carried on with the job. Set apart from the city by the traditions of military service, yet they were still an integral part of the Hamilton community and gave what service they could to the city whose freedom they possessed.

- <sup>1</sup> New Zealand Official Year Book 1942, p. 48.
- <sup>2</sup> New Zealand Official Year Book 1962, p. 50.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid. Only Rotorua and Tauranga were faster growing.
- <sup>4</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, Feb. 1958.
- <sup>5</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, Mar. 1961.
- <sup>6</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, June, 1962.
- <sup>7</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, June, 1962.
- <sup>8</sup> see Appendix A.
- <sup>9</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Official Programme for Charter Parade, 10th Nov. 1962.
- <sup>10</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, June 1982.
- <sup>11</sup> Letters to Te Rapa Base, Historical Records File, National Archives, Auckland.
- <sup>12</sup> No 1 Stores Depot RNZAF, 50th Anniversary Reunion Programme, 1989.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Mrs. Muriel McMillan, Oct. 1992.
- <sup>14</sup> New Zealand Herald, "RNZAF at Te Rapa since 1943", 4th Feb. 1978. Sect. 3, p. 16.
- <sup>15</sup> Minute to HQNZDF, from RNZAF Te Rapa, "Reduction of 1 SD Operations: Effects on Te Rapa", April, 1991.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Wg/Comdr.(Ret) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992.
- <sup>17</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, May 1967.
- <sup>18</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, Aug. 1983.
- <sup>19</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, Sep. 1978.
- <sup>20</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, Jan. 1992. and Waikato Times, "Search For Clues Continues" 15th Jan, 1992, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit History Sheets, Sep. 1963.



## Chapter Five.

### **TE RAPA AT PLAY.**

If there is one thing for which Te Rapa will be remembered within the RNZAF, it is the sporting achievements of its personnel. Te Rapa never had more than one hundred and eighty people working on the Base and frequently the numbers were much lower than this establishment figure. Although this is a very small number of people from which to choose teams, yet somehow Te Rapa always managed to compete creditably in the various Interbase competitions.

Rugby, of course, was the major sport in the RNZAF and the trophy for Interbase competition was the Isitt Cup. Competition for this trophy has always been fierce and in the 1950s and 1960s, Te Rapa was a strong contender for the silverware.

During this period rugby was the only acceptable sport for male airmen in winter, as it was for most of New Zealand. In 1954 AC 2 Shotton arrived from England to serve at Te Rapa. The transport to pick him up at the railway station did not arrive for some time and therefore he was late reporting for duty. Reporting to the Station Warrant Officer he was informed bluntly that he had erred. However his error would be overlooked if he played football. The relieved airman announced that he did play football, and his position was goalkeeper. This unfortunately was a further error; football at Te Rapa meant rugby, not soccer, and no football apart from rugby was played.<sup>1</sup>

Although the game was taken very seriously, there were times when the best team was not picked. In the mid 1950s the Te Rapa side played in the local club competition at senior reserve level. But not all the airmen actually played for this team. A number of the better players played for the Marist senior side in order to get a higher level of competition. For many years these players were not considered eligible for the Te Rapa Isitt Cup team

because they were not playing for Te Rapa in the local competition.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this handicap and the fewer eligible males compared to the other Stations, Te Rapa reached the final of the Isitt cup on three occasions. In 1953 they were beaten by Wigram 20-12, in 1968 they lost 17-14 to Woodbourne, while in 1954 came Te Rapa's finest rugby hour, when they drew the final with Woodbourne and shared the trophy.<sup>3</sup>

In more recent years the rugby standard of the Base fell away. No longer were there Te Rapa personnel playing in the Waikato provincial side, as there had often been in the fifties and sixties. Te Rapa Base could no longer scrape together enough players to enter a purely Air Force team in the local competition. The moment of greatest humiliation came when in 1985, Te Rapa was forced to combine with Auckland to compete in the Isitt cup.

But there was still a lot of pride involved in the Rugby competition. During the tenure of Wing Commander. T.J. Kelly as C.O., a certain airman was due to appear on a number of charges related to drunken and disorderly behaviour. Because the Isitt cup tourney was coming up, the charges were postponed and the airman was allowed to play. For the first time in many years Te Rapa actually won a game during the tournament and the miscreant was the player of the day. In a benevolent and merciful victory mood, the C.O. informed the airman that his rugby playing feats had earned him a complete pardon.<sup>4</sup>

The many years the Te Rapa side played in the Hamilton Club competition, eventually led to the forming of a new club, the Te Rapa Rugby Football Club.<sup>5</sup> From its beginnings as a adjunct of the Te Rapa Station, the club has grown until in 1992, the Te Rapa Sports Club is a thriving and popular club not only strong in rugby, but cricket and other sports.

Rugby may have been the main sport but many other sports were played on Base. As with most military units, shooting played a big part in the Base activities. Shooting was one of the sports which made a regular

appearance in the frequent competitions between Hopu Hopu Army Camp and Te Rapa. The Schinkel trophies were also competed for at the annual weapons qualification shoot. Sergeant H. Schinkel was a top marksman at the Station in the 1950s, and on his retirement, he donated trophies to be presented to the top marksman and woman on Base each year.<sup>6</sup>

But outside these two traditional sports there were a host of others at which the Te Rapa personnel regularly performed well. Interbase or Interstation sports tournaments were held in every conceivable sport, and Te Rapa in spite of its small size, competed in virtually every one. This put considerable pressure on the sportsmen of the base. There were a number who became virtual professional sportspeople, because of the large number of Interbase events that they attended. But in spite of the many hours spent playing competitive sport, most people considered that they still did the work required of them by working weekends and late nights.

In the late 1950s the rigidity of playing only one winter football code was relaxed somewhat and soccer became a popular sport. This is hardly surprising considering the numbers of former Englishmen in the RNZAF at the time. Perhaps due to this influence, Te Rapa quickly excelled at the new sport and in 1958 and 1959 won several trophies in both local and Interstation competition. Soccer continued to be played until the closure of the Base, although during the 1980s, the standard slipped slightly, and the team was entered in the Hamilton Businesshouse Sunday League, rather than the mainstream club competition. In 1979 the airwomen joined the men as soccer players and formed a womens team to play in the local competition.<sup>7</sup> The following year the women won the Challenge Shield and continued to show good results for several years.

Softball was strong on occasion in both men's and women's grades. In 1953 the men's team held the Pettit Cup, the Interstation softball trophy, and competed well in most other years. The women won the Interbase

Tournament in 1984, and showed their true class by also winning the sportsmanship trophy for that year.

Squash was played on Base after the courts were completed in 1987. Prior to this, squash had been part of the Wednesday afternoon sports, but had been played in nearby Ngaruawahia.

Volleyball began in 1974, and by the mid 1980s had become a success story particularly in the women's division. Three times during the decade the women took the Interbase title, in spite of the fact that the gym roof was really too low to practise good volleyball.<sup>8</sup>

Tennis was one of the most successful sports on Base. The Te Rapa team won the Interbase title on numerous occasions and if they didn't actually win the tournament they always put up a good showing.

Netball was also popular and the team won the Interbase trophy twice, and was runner up several times. Hockey was strong for a number of years and teams of both men and women won their respective Interstation competitions several times, as well as competing creditably in the local leagues. Athletics, bowls, badminton, basketball, cricket and top town competitions also added to the sporting atmosphere of the Base.

For most of these competitions it rarely mattered if there were insufficient skilled players to form a team. On Sundays, when the soccer team had a match, if there were not enough players, someone would be sent to knock on doors in the housing area until enough ring-ins had been gathered to start the game. People arriving at Te Rapa for their tour of duty were regularly informed that they were now a member of whichever team was short of players for the next Interbase.

On only one occasion was a Te Rapa team not going to be allowed to compete at an Interbase because it was not of a good enough standard. Again it was Wing Commander Kelly who was not going to be shamed by the performance of the basketball team. Early in the season they had been beaten

by close to a hundred points in a game with Hopu Hopu Camp. Wing Commander Kelly therefore decreed, that if the team did not improve drastically, it would not be given permission to attend that year's Interbase tournament. This shook the team to its core, and they began an intensive programme of practise under the tutelage of the Base Physical Training Instructor. (PTI) After some months of this they again played Hopuhopu and again lost, but this time by only twenty odd points. The C.O. relented and the basketball team duly took its place at the Interbase. To the astonishment of all concerned, they justified their place by actually winning a game and not coming last overall.<sup>9</sup>

But a resume of the sporting history of Te Rapa would be incomplete without a mention of the sports event for which the Base was most famous. This was the RNZAF Golf Society Tournament, held at Lochiel Golf Course every year since 1970. This tournament was distinct from the Interbase tournaments, in that, past and present members of the RNZAF were members of the Golf Society and therefore played in the Lochiel tournament.

The field for the tournament would number over a hundred and would often necessitate extra staff in the kitchens and a major reshuffling of barracks to provide enough accommodation for the extra guests. Many of these visitors would be high ranking retired officers, and there are many stories of abuse being hurled at strange civilians in the sergeants mess, only to find later that the injured party was in fact, a retired Air Vice Marshall or something similar.<sup>10</sup>

Sport therefore played a major role in the life of the Base. Perhaps more so than on other bases, because of the sedentary nature of the work at Te Rapa. It was a greater relief to the stores personnel (or "grocers", as they were known) to be able to leave their stores and venture onto the other bases in search of sporting success.

Te Rapa regularly took its turn at hosting the various Interbase

tournaments, and on other occasions also hosted the Interservice tournaments between, Army, Navy, Air Force and Police. The Base was renowned for its hospitality and in one example a visiting officer was refused permission to visit the Base in passing. Nothing would be acceptable unless he stayed for dinner and drinks afterwards, then spent the night on Base and remained most of the next day.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the messes on Base were popular places and like all military bars the alcohol was cheap and plentiful. Parties, and more sedate functions were often scheduled and usually well attended, indicating a high morale among the Base personnel. Unfortunately for some of the more convivial souls, there was a major obstacle between the messes and the barracks. The large drain which divided the Base in two, trapped many an inebriated airman returning to his barracks after a good night in the bar.<sup>12</sup>

The drain was also useful as a dividing line for competitions between east and west. East side of the drain and West side of the drain. Top town competitions were also held between the different sites and in 1984 a trophy was awarded to the winner of the annual top-town events. This trophy was named the Seton Nisbett trophy in honour of an airman who had been killed the previous year.

Seton Nisbett was one of two airmen who shared the same room in the barracks, both of whom were killed in separate motor accidents no more than two months apart. Whether this was merely coincidence or not, a priest blessed the room where the men had lived, in an effort to allay people's fears.<sup>13</sup>

Although most of the personnel on the Base were regular force Air Force personnel, there were a number of civilians working in various jobs, and also General Service Hands (GSH) who were employed on a contractual basis and could be released at any time. These GSHs did work as security guards manning the main gate, and assisted with other tasks throughout the camp.

A further group of individuals who were not regular force

personnel made up the RNZAF Te Rapa Pipe Band. This band was the only one of its kind in the Air Force. It was made up of pipes and drums while all others were brass.

The band was formed in 1960 and first appeared as a single piper and several drummers in the Battle of Britain Parade on the 18th of September in that year.<sup>14</sup> The next major appearance was at a parade preceding the rugby match between France and Waikato in 1961.<sup>15</sup> Initially the members were all regular servicemen but as the years passed, this changed and the members were recruited into the Territorial Air Force, solely as bandsmen. The band would play at the official Base parades and since these were infrequent, it would also take engagements to play at many other varied events. These included; the march past of Crete veterans in 1982, annual Santa parades in both Auckland and Hamilton, field days and shows in various places, including an annual appearance in Morrinsville, and ANZAC day at Ohaupo.<sup>16</sup>

The band struggled along for many years paying its own way with little support from the Air Force. Kilts and uniforms were bought out of the Base Welfare funds and at other times, paid for by the band members. At the RNZAF Band competitions the Te Rapa band was a fish out of water. It could not compete with the Brass bands of the other bases and therefore spent most of its time at these competitions giving concerts in the local area.<sup>17</sup> On the odd occasion the band won the drumming section of the RNZAF competitions, but generally attendance at these competitions was not a huge success. Finally in the late 1980s the band was permitted to forego the Air Force competition and attend the National Pipe Band Championships.

The band, under Bandmaster Sergeant Ritchie, finally came of age at these competitions and worked its way through the grades, until in 1992 it was finally promoted to grade one status. Unfortunately the band was destined never to play in grade one, as the closure of the Base also signalled the end of the band. After finally reaching a position as one of the best pipe bands

in the country, the Base closure was a sad end for an excellent musical group. The final performance of the only pipe band in the RNZAF was in 1992, at the closing ceremonies of its home.



- <sup>1</sup> Interview with Wg/Comdr.(Ret) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992.
- <sup>3</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa Unit History Sheets, Aug. 1953, Sep. 1954, and Aug. 1968.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with, F/Sgt. M. Steel, F/Sgt. S. Martinsen, F/Sgt. T. Dragovich, Cpl. P. Darke, Cpl. M. Green, 15th Oct. 1992.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview with F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992.
- <sup>6</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa Unit History Sheets, Feb. 1982.
- <sup>7</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa Unit History Sheets, March 1979.
- <sup>8</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa Unit History Sheets, May 1982, May 1985, and June 1986.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with, F/Sgt. M. Steel, F/Sgt. S. Martinsen, F/Sgt. T. Dragovich, Cpl. P. Darke, Cpl. M. Green, 15th Oct. 1992.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with, F/Sgt. M. Steel, F/Sgt. S. Martinsen, F/Sgt. T. Dragovich, Cpl. P. Darke, Cpl. M. Green, 15th Oct. 1992.
- <sup>11</sup> Interviews with Wg/Comdr. J.B. McLean, and Sqn/Ldr. B. Urquhart, 15th Oct. 1992.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with, F/Sgt. M. Steel, F/Sgt. S. Martinsen, F/Sgt. T. Dragovich, Cpl. P. Darke, Cpl. M. Green, 15th Oct. 1992.
- <sup>13</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa Unit History Sheets, Feb. 1984, and Interviews with Mr. Alan Walton, and, F/Sgt. M. Steel, F/Sgt. S. Martinsen, F/Sgt. T. Dragovich, Cpl. P. Darke, Cpl. M. Green, 15th Oct. 1992.
- <sup>14</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa Unit History Sheets, Sep. 1960.
- <sup>15</sup> "Administration Study of Te Rapa Pipe Band," for C.O. RNZAF Te Rapa, 1987.
- <sup>16</sup> RNZAF Te Rapa Unit History Sheets, and, "Administration Study of Te Rapa Pipe Band", for C.O. RNZAF Te Rapa, 1987.
- <sup>17</sup> "Administration Study of Te Rapa Pipe Band", for C.O. RNZAF Te Rapa, 1987.

## Chapter Six

**THE ENDING: IN YEARS OF PEACE.**

In 1988 the New Zealand Defence Forces commissioned Strategos Consulting to review the resources of the Defence Force and recommend any cost saving measures that could be implemented. In December of 1988 the report was published as the Resource Management Review 1988.<sup>1</sup> Although the Review was only a recommendation, many sweeping changes have been based on the findings of Mr. Quigley and his associates at Strategos Consulting.

The recommendation that was to have the greatest impact on the Air Force was, that the Te Rapa Base should be closed and its holdings redistributed among the operational bases.<sup>2</sup> The rationalisation for this was a plan to concentrate the armed forces in eight locations. Linton, Burnham, Tekapo and Waiouru for the Army, Devonport for the Navy, and Ohakea, Woodbourne and Wigram for the Air Force. A central store for all three services would be based at Trentham, thus doing away with the need for a separate supply base at Te Rapa.<sup>3</sup>

As well as reducing the large costs of operating many bases, three points were cited as the major advantages of the proposed closures. The first two of these had little application to Te Rapa. *Maximising Training Facilities* and *Operational Concentration*, had little relevance to a central supply depot. But the third reason, *Optimising Inventory Management and Distribution*, seemed to show that Te Rapa was no longer a necessary link in the Air Force supply chain. RNZAF stores would now arrive at the appropriate port and be shipped direct to the bases at Woodbourne, Ohakea and Wigram.<sup>4</sup>

The Strategos report was not immediately enacted, and has yet to be fully implemented. But certain of the recommendations with regard to Base closures were heeded by people in high places. The Air Force was carrying out its own study of the matter and at about the same time as the Strategos

Report, had commissioned its own review of stores management within the RNZAF.<sup>5</sup> This was carried out by the C.O. of Te Rapa in 1988, Wing Commander J. Worden. His report, entitled, RNZAF Stores Management Review,<sup>6</sup> considered the central depot system represented by Te Rapa to be an inefficient and outdated method of supply.

*“The centralised depot operation is not beneficial to the RNZAF, as the penalties in stock availability and overhead costs outweigh the traditional advantages of maintaining a remote depot. The warehousing operation at RNZAF Te Rapa is inefficient, expensive to run, and needs to be modernised.”<sup>7</sup>*

This was not necessarily the view held by all former C.O.s of Te Rapa. Wing Commander W. D. Shotton considered the base to be ideally situated, and an efficient and cost effective means of supplying the Air Force. His argument is based on the fact that the railway was an efficient and quick method of sending stores to the various consumer bases. For items required in Auckland, the main road provided a connection of less than two hours driving time. Further weight is lent to his case by the failure of the attempt to hold stores close to the aircraft in the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> (see chapter 2) But unfortunately for the Te Rapa Base, the Review was written by one of his successors, who did not hold such a high opinion of the specialist stores Base.

Other former C.O.s, Wing Commanders Marr and Kelly, consider the Base closure to have been inevitable, but still considered that Te Rapa had been a more efficient organisation than Wing Commander Worden’s stated view.<sup>9</sup> Squadron Leader B. E. Joblin, the last Officer Commanding of the Stores Depot, agrees with the Review and considers that closing Te Rapa is the best thing the Air Force has done in a long time. According to him, since the closure the supply system has never worked better.<sup>10</sup>

Wing Commander Worden proposed only two alternative options which he considered viable. These were: firstly, to transfer all stores to RNZAF

Base Auckland, or secondly, transfer all stores to Auckland, Ohakea, Woodbourne and Wigram on a prime user basis. (The Base using the item the most would hold all of that item.)

The first option would save more money in virtually all areas. It would be cheaper to set up, and the annual savings would be greater after the first five years. But because the stores would all be held in one place, there would be few savings on the actual amount of items held. Te Rapa could operate almost as effectively. The major advantage of the dispersal option was that the inventory could be smaller and thus millions of dollars could be saved each year.

His final recommendation was that the dispersal on a prime user basis should be adopted because it would cost less in the long term. When the Defence vote was cut in the 1991 Budget, Wing Commander Worden's recommendations were adopted by the RNZAF. A working group was set up in June 1991 to oversee the closure and dispersal of stores to the remaining bases.<sup>11</sup> A date of June 1993 was set for the final return of the base to the crown, but it was soon discovered that the redistribution could actually be done much sooner. A new date, the 1st of October 1992, was set as the final closure date. The actual closure ceremonies and major wind down of Base activities would take place before this date, but by the beginning of October, Te Rapa should be emptied of stores and personnel.<sup>12</sup>

From the point at which the working group was set up, the remaining time before the closure was divided into three phases. The Project would be named Operation Restore and the first phase, for research, would take from July to September 1991. Phase two, the planning phase, would be complete by March 1992, and the final phase, the actual closure and movement of stores, would finish with the official handover in October 1992.

When the closure was finally announced, Te Rapa held approximately 130,000 lines of stock.<sup>13</sup> Every item that could possibly be

required at some time, was stored as insurance against the day when it might be needed. These thousands of items, large and small, had to be relocated in a mammoth transportation operation. Each one of the 130,000 lines had to be checked and inventoried. Many of the parts were assessed as no longer required and were disposed of, while for other parts there was no obvious prime user Base. A decision had to be made as to where these would be held, before they could be despatched.

Surprisingly few ancient and obsolete parts were discovered in the relocation process. The most unusual find was a rudder from a Harvard, but this was later found to have been planted as a joke by the RNZAF Museum staff.<sup>14</sup>

Of the 130,000 lines, approximately 80,000 were eventually relocated on one of the consumer bases. The other 50,000 were assessed as being surplus and were auctioned off or disposed of in other ways.<sup>15</sup> The transportation of the stores was a tricky job involving millions of dollars worth of equipment. The insurance premium for the move was \$25,734, and the total sum insured, \$50,000,000.<sup>16</sup>

The personnel were not so easily relocated. Fifty three of the regular force people owned their own homes in the Hamilton area. For these service-people the shift to another base was a problem. With so many houses going on the depressed Hamilton market simultaneously, the market was likely to become even more depressed, resulting in lower prices than might otherwise have been expected.<sup>17</sup>

The forty two General Service Hands employed on the Base were also adversely affected. Few of these workers were of an age where finding alternative employment would be an easy task. Their conditions of service did not allow for redeployment on the same basis as the regular Air Force personnel. For most of them, short notice and an unpaid redundancy was the only option.<sup>18</sup>

The twenty five civilian employees were also Hamilton residents and were slightly better off than the GSHs. They were entitled to retraining and relocation within the RNZAF. However few opted for this, preferring to remain in Hamilton and take the redundancy handout offered to them under their employment terms.<sup>19</sup>

So fifty years of supply came to an end on the 1st of October 1992. Earlier that year, on March 27, the official closure ceremony had taken place with the Queens colour paraded through Hamilton for the last time. A large gathering of past and present Te Rapa personnel watched the final parade and flypast as the Te Rapa Base gave up its function. For many it was a sad occasion and tears were shed by several former Te Rapa stalwarts.<sup>20</sup>

This depth of feeling indicates the affection inspired by the small Base and the loyalty of those who worked there. For fifty years these workers kept the Base viable. Without the thousands of airmen and women who worked the supply system throughout the years, Te Rapa could never have operated in an effective manner. After all, the Base was only a group of buildings, the real atmosphere was provided by the dozens of characters who gave the Base its life and made it such an enjoyable place to be posted.

With the Air Force gone, the Base reverted to the Crown and the debate began over who had the best claim to the land and buildings. The descendants of the original farmer, John Livingstone, were the first in line if they could afford to buy back the land. After extensive negotiations, the Tainui Trust Board bought the twenty six hectares of land and set a handover date of March 1993. Te Rapa appears set to become some form of educational institution combined with a business centre, although details are still to be finalised and the exact fate is unlikely to be known until well into 1993.<sup>21</sup>

The Air Force appears to have made a good transition to its new system of supply with few of the problems that plagued the previous attempt to decentralise the stores.<sup>22</sup> With specialist warehousing leased to accommodate

the stores at some of the new locations, there should not be the same difficulties associated with temporary accommodation in a hangar, as there were in 1965.<sup>23</sup>

So RNZAF Te Rapa is gone and with it is gone the system of a central supply depot. More than anything else this indicates a growing ability for the RNZAF to make its own decisions without following in the footsteps of any other air force. In the political climate which prevails in New Zealand in the 1990s this cannot be a bad thing. With our major allies disenchanted with our Government's anti-nuclear stance, the RNZAF must stand more and more on its own. This has resulted in decisions based on what is best for the RNZAF rather than what was best for someone else, as happened in the years immediately following World War 2.

Therefore having served well for fifty years, the Te Rapa Base may also have served the Air Force well in its closure. The money saved by the closure of Te Rapa can be used in many ways to make the RNZAF into a more effective force. Whether this force is used in peacekeeping roles overseas, or merely in a security role within New Zealand, every cent saved is vital to keep the RNZAF viable in the face of diminishing Defence budgets.

But this does not diminish the feeling of sadness on the part of those who once worked on the little supply Base. And neither does it provide solace for all those small boys who rather liked the idea of having an Air Force Base as part of their town.

<sup>1</sup> Resource Management Review 1988, Strategos Consulting Ltd., 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> Air Staff letter to C.O. RNZAF Te Rapa, 1st Oct. 1987. and Support Group letter to C.O. RNZAF Te Rapa, 21st Jan. 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Wg/Comdr. J. Worden, "RNZAF Stores Management Review," 1988, History file RNZAF Te Rapa, National Archives, Auckland.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Wg/Comdr.(Ret.) W. D. Shotton, 27th Nov. 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Interviews with Wg/Comdr.(Ret) E.K. Marr, 22nd July 1992, and Wg/Comdr. (Ret) T.J. Kelly MBE, 25th Jan. 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Sqn/Ldr. B.E. Joblin, 20th Feb. 1993.

<sup>11</sup> RNZAF News, Oct. 1991.

<sup>12</sup> RNZAF News, "The Big Shift for Te Rapa", May 1992.

<sup>13</sup> "RNZAF Stores Management Review," 1988, Annex G, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Sqn/Ldr. B. Urquhart, Operation Restore Project Officer, 15th Oct. 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Sqn/Ldr. B. Urquhart, Operation Restore Project Officer, 15th Oct. 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Invoice from Willis, Coroon, McNicol Ltd. 5th Mar. 1992. Operation Restore Files, National Archives, Auckland.

<sup>17</sup> "Reduction of 1 S.D. Operations: Effects on Te Rapa", C.O. RNZAF Te Rapa to HQNZDF (Air), April, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with F/Sgt.(Ret.) P.J. McQuillan, 30th Nov. 1992 and RNZAF News, "The Big Shift for Te Rapa", May 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Waikato Times, "New Life for Te Rapa Base", 22nd Jan. 1993.

<sup>22</sup> see chapter 2, pp. 23-24

<sup>23</sup> RNZAF News, "The Big Shift for Te Rapa", May 1992.



APPENDIX A.

**City of Hamilton**

**Charter**

**The Te Rapa Station**

**R.N.Z.A.F.**

Whereas the Mayor, Councillors and Citizens of the City of Hamilton being sensible of the honourable record and traditions of the Te Rapa Station and being desirous of recognising, cementing and fostering the intimate association which is now and has for so long been enjoyed between the City and the Station in which so many of its sons have been proud to serve.

Now therefore the Mayor and Councillors of the City of Hamilton do hereby confer on the Te Rapa Station the right and privilege, without further permission being obtained, of marching with drums beating, band playing, colours flying, bayonets fixed, and swords drawn through the streets of the City of Hamilton.

And do hereby accept the honour of viewing the Te Rapa Station once in each year for the purpose of an inspection by His Worship the Mayor.

And do hereby accept the further honour of having two officers of the Te Rapa Station in uniform in attendance upon His Worship the Mayor on important official occasions.

Pursuant to a resolution of the Hamilton City Council passed on the 15th day of June 1962 the Common Seal of the Body Corporate called the Mayor, Councillors and Citizens of the City of Hamilton was hereto affixed in the presence of :-

.....Mayor

.....Town Clerk

## **APPENDIX B.**

### **RNZAF HAMILTON COMMANDING OFFICERS.**

April 1942 - Aug. 1942	Squadron Leader F. Butler
Aug. 1942 - Sep. 1942	Wing Commander E. A. Gibson
Sep. 1942 - Jan. 1943	Wing Commander J. T. Brown
Jan. 1943 - April 1944	Wing Commander W. Temple
April 1944 - April 1946	Wing Commander A. M. S. Manhire

### **RNZAF TE RAPA COMMANDING OFFICERS.**

April 1946 - April 1949	Squadron Leader H. G. Wilson
April 1949 - Jan. 1950	Wing Commander W. D. Abernethy
Jan. 1950 - June 1951	Squadron Leader R. B. Watson (Acting C.O.)
June 1951 - Dec. 1951	Squadron Leader A. R. Grimwood (Acting C.O.)
Dec. 1951 - Nov. 1956	Wing Commander T. B. Pledger
Dec. 1956 - Oct. 1959	Wing Commander E. G. King OBE
Nov. 1959 - Sep. 1961	Wing Commander K. E. Fennessey
Oct. 1961 - June 1963	Wing Commander V. G Baskiville-Robinson MBE
July 1963 - Jan. 1966	Wing Commander G. E. Erridge OBE
Jan. 1966 - May 1968	Squadron Leader J. D. Waugh
May 1968 - May 1972	Squadron Leader J. N. Harris MBE
May 1972 - Feb. 1975	Wing Commander E. K. Marr
Feb. 1975 - July 1978	Wing Commander A. B. Everitt
July 1978 - Jan. 1979	Wing Commander T. J. Kelly MBE
Jan. 1979 - July 1979	Wing Commander W. D. Shotton (Acting C.O.)
July 1979 - Dec. 1980	Wing Commander R. W. Young
Jan. 1981 - Dec. 1982	Wing Commander W. D. Shotton
Jan. 1983 - Dec. 1986	Wing Commander T. J. Kelly MBE
Dec. 1986 - Aug. 1989	Wing Commander J. Worden
Aug. 1989 - Feb. 1990	Squadron Leader C. W. Anderson (Acting C.O.)
Feb. 1990 - Mar. 1992	Wing Commander B. A. Wootton
Mar. 1992 - Sep. 1992	Squadron Leader C. W. Anderson

### **NO. 1 STORES DEPOT COMMANDING OFFICERS**

1942 - 1944	Squadron Leader H. G. Wilson
1945	Squadron Leader A. J. Jackson
1946 - 1949	Squadron Leader H. G. Wilson

### **NO. 1 STORES DEPOT CHIEF EQUIPMENT OFFICERS**

1949 -	Flight Lieutenant R. B. Watson
	Squadron Leader A. R. Grimwood
	Squadron Leader G. K. Taylor
	Squadron Leader G. E. Erridge
	Squadron Leader P. W. Harrap
	Squadron Leader G. K. Young
- 1965	Squadron Leader H. E. Cundell

### **NO. 1 STORES DEPOT COMMANDING OFFICERS**

Sep. 1965 - Dec. 1968	Squadron Leader W. H. Hillman
Dec. 1968 - Jun. 1970	Squadron Leader E. J. Brown
Jun. 1970 - May 1972	Squadron Leader E. K. Marr

### **NO. 1 STORES DEPOT OFFICERS COMMANDING**

Jun. 1972 - Feb. 1975	Squadron Leader W. D. Shotton
Feb. 1975 - Mar. 1976	Squadron Leader T. H. Crew
Mar. 1976 - Jun. 1977	Squadron Leader T. J. Kelly
Jun. 1977 - Dec. 1977	Squadron Leader C. B. Raddock
Dec. 1977 - Aug. 1978	Squadron Leader T. J. Kelly MBE
Aug. 1978 - Jan. 1979	Squadron Leader W. D. Shotton
Jan. 1979 - Sep. 1979	Squadron Leader R. R. Meyrick
Sep. 1979 - Mar. 1982	Squadron Leader D. K. Carey (RAF)
Mar. 1982 - July 1986	Squadron Leader D. G. Hall
July 1986 - Mar. 1988	Squadron Leader B. M. Garnett
Mar. 1988 - July 1988	Squadron Leader J. B. McLean
July 1988 - Jan. 1989	Squadron Leader M. J. Elliott
Jan. 1989 - Apr. 1990	Flight Lieutenant W. J. McKenzie
Apr. 1990 - Feb. 1992	Squadron Leader B. E. Joblin

**Sources:** RNZAF Hamilton, and, RNZAF Te Rapa, Unit Histories 1942 -1992, and, RNZAF Base Te Rapa Closure Ceremonies, Official programme, 1992.

## **APPENDIX C.**

### **AIRCRAFT OPERATED BY THE RNZAF AFTER 1945.**

<b><u>Aircraft type</u></b>	<b><u>Years of service</u></b>
Aermacchi MB 339C	1991 -
Aerospace CT4B Airtrainer	1976 -
Aerospace AESL Airtourer	1970 - 1993
Airspeed A.S. 10 Oxford	1938 - 1954
Auster J/5 and T7c	1947 - 1970
Avro 625A Anson	1942 - 1952
BAC 167 Strikemaster	1972 - 1992
Bell 47G Sioux	1966 - 1984
Bell Iroquois	1966 -
Bristol 170 Freighter	1951 - 1977
Chance-Vought F4U Corsair	1944 - 1948
Consolidated PBY Catalina	1943 - 1952
Curtiss P-40 Warhawk/Kittyhawk	1942 - 1948
De Havilland DH 82A Tiger Moth	1939 - 1956
De Havilland DH 98 Mosquito	1946 - 1955
De Havilland DH 100 Vampire	1951 - 1972
De Havilland DH Devon	1948 - 1978
Douglas SBD Dauntless	1943 - 1948
Douglas C-47 Dakota	1943 - 1977
Douglas DC-6	1961 - 1968
English Electric Canberra	1959 - 1970
Fokker F-27-120 Friendship	1980 -
Grumman TBF Avenger	1943 - 1959
Handley Page Hastings C-3	1952 - 1965
Hawker Siddeley Andover C-1	1976 -
Lockheed Hudson	1941 - 1949
Lockheed C-60 Lodestar	1943 - 1949
Lockheed Ventura	1943 - 1948
Lockheed C-130 Hercules	1965 -
Lockheed P3B Orion	1966 -
McDonnell-Douglas Skyhawk A4K	1970 -
Miles M 57 Aerovan	1949 - 1951
North American Harvard	1941 - 1978
North American P 51 Mustang	1945 - 1957
Short Sunderland	1944 - 1967
Westland Wasp HAS 1	1966 -

**Source:** Burgess, M., Aircraft of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, Dunedin, 1979.

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